



Anton Flores-Maisonet

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Giving Thanks at the Gates of Hell

By Anton Flores-Maisonet

Most mornings, as the city stirs to life, we stand at the gates of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) — watching, waiting, witnessing. The air is thick with worry as a line of newcomers to the United States stands outside this unmarked and imposing building. Some clutch paperwork, some whisper desperate prayers, and some simply hold the hands of their loved ones, bracing for what's to come.

With Know-Your-Rights cards in hand and a bag filled with snacks, Casa Alternativa volunteers and staff stand in solidarity with those navigating America's cruel deportation system. The work is simple — informing people of their constitutional rights, helping with check-in paperwork, offering overnight hospitality and sharing encouragement — but it is filled with love and purpose. It is a practice of accompaniment, of showing up at the gates of a proverbial hell.

A Song of Thanksgiving

We saw love, hope and the unbreakable spirit of a family determined to stay together. One morning, I met a man from Mexico, fasting and praying while his wife and child checked in. His quiet vigil was a faithful act of a desperate man. When his family emerged, relief spread across his face. “God has answered my prayers,” he said, then turned to his young son. “Please, sing a song of thanks.”

The boy's small voice pierced the air, and I could imagine that even the angels were silent. The low hum of traffic and the murmur of worried conversations seemed to hush for a moment as his song of gratitude rose outside a place built to break spirits. “Demos gracias al Señor, demos gracias...” (We give thanks to the Lord, we give thanks....)

From the sidewalk, it's clear that this entire process — the long lines, the all-too-common dehumanization and the layers of

security, from the tall iron gate to guards to on-site law enforcement — is designed for one purpose: intimidation. Yet, at these gates of ICE, we bore witness to something far greater.

A Place to Rest

Later that day, another act of hospitality unfolded. A Caribbean man had arrived in Atlanta from Pennsylvania a day early for his immigration court case, without any plans or funds for lodging. A South American woman selling comfort food from the back of her car to weary travelers outside the ICE field office noticed his distress. She referred him to us, and we welcomed him into Casa Alternativa — no charge, no questions, just a place to rest his head and soul.

Hospitality is what mercy looks like in practice. Hospitality, in its truest form, is never transactional. It is an invitation to say that no one should ever face the unknown alone. It is a declaration that, in this strange land, we will be your friend. It is what mercy looks like in practice.

We Give Thanks

One morning, a West African man approached me with good news. After years of reporting to ICE, this was the last day he'd have to check in — he was finally free from state surveillance. Against all odds, a harsh chapter of oppression was ending.

His asylum had been granted and his green card was pending. At long last, his family's future was secure, and he felt truly free.

He introduced me to his wife and child standing beside him in the crisp Atlanta air. And as if on cue, he smiled and echoed the words I had heard once before on this same stretch of sidewalk: “We give thanks.”

These gates are meant to be a threshold of fear. But in the shadow of ICE, where policies divide and punish, something else takes root — mercy, resilience and a defiant, unshakeable hope. We give thanks. ✦

Anton Flores-Maisonet is the founding director of Casa Alternativa, a nonprofit practicing radical hospitality with vulnerable immigrants. Since 2020, Casa Alternativa has housed nearly 600 immigrants from over 50 countries, in partnership with the Atlanta Friends Meeting and Atlanta Mennonite Church. Anton and his wife, Charlotte, serve as Friends-in-Residence at the Atlanta Friends Meeting. (anton@casaalterna.org)



Joanie Ferguson

Above: *The gates at the Immigration and Customs office in Atlanta, Georgia, February 2024.*



Anton Flores-Maisonet

Right: *Casa Alternativa Court Compass volunteers, April 2025.*



Above: *Know-Your-Rights cards come in English and 19 other languages.*

The Final Hours of Jessie Hoffman

Murdered by the State of Louisiana, March 18, 2025

By Bill Quigley

Three hours before he was to be murdered by the State of Louisiana, Jessie Hoffman greeted me with a strong handshake and an embrace. He stared deep into my eyes and thanked me for coming. We discussed his son, also named Jessie, and how proud he has made his dad. Also visiting were three of the many lawyers who had been fighting for his life: Cecelia Trenticosta Kappel of the Loyola Center for Social Justice, Samantha Bosalavage Pourciau of the Promise of Justice Initiative, and Sarah Ottinger, who had been representing Jessie Hoffman for 19 years. I was there to witness the murder of Mr. Hoffman, if Louisiana reversed its course and allowed one of the legal team to remain through the whole process.

Already in the room when we arrived was Rev. Reimoku Gregory Smith, a Buddhist priest whom Hoffman chose to accompany him. Jessie is a practicing Buddhist and has been a leader among those in prison for decades. Reverend Reimoku was in long black robes. He was serene and almost glowing in kindness.

We sat around a big wooden conference table that had the logo of the State of Louisiana carved into the middle of it. Uniformed officers from the Louisiana State Penitentiary sat at opposite ends of the room. There were two big pictures on the walls — one of Elijah on a flaming chariot and one of Daniel in the lion's den. The room in which Louisiana planned to murder Jessie Hoffman was steps away.

Jessie Hoffman is about six feet tall and muscular. He was wearing a black t-shirt that said Life Row in white letters on it — the name that its 50-plus occupants prefer to call what the outside world calls death row. He had been fasting for days. He mostly sat silently with his arms on the wooden table, staring intently at whoever was talking to him.

Jessie was holding his favorite book, *The Heart of The Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy and Liberation* by Thich Nhat Hanh. Thich Nhat Hanh was a Vietnamese Buddhist Zen Master, author, poet and peacemaker who was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967 by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Jessie asked Reverend Reimoku to read his favorite passage from the book to us. It was called the Four Immeasurable Minds: Loving-Kindness, Compassion, Joy and Equanimity. He read and reflected as we took in these words together. Jessie occasionally closed his eyes.

Louisiana was scheduled to murder Jessie Hoffman by first immobilizing him by tying down his arms, hands, legs and torso on

a crucifix-like platform. Then, once he was helpless to resist, they would cover his face with an industrial-grade respirator and pump his lungs full of poison high-grade nitrogen gas. Nitrogen gas causes death by depriving the body of oxygen, essentially causing suffocation in a phenomenon known as hypoxia. This method is so horrible that all but two states have stopped using nitrogen gas on animals, declaring it inhumane. The United Nations Commissioner on Human Rights has condemned the use of nitrogen gas in executions, saying its use could amount to torture or other cruel,

inhuman or degrading punishment in violation of international human rights law.

Jessie Hoffman was to be murdered by Louisiana because he had as a teenager — after years of shocking physical, sexual and psychological abuse — committed a horrible murder in 1996. Now the Louisiana governor claimed it was necessary for the state to respond to this murder by itself murdering Jessie Hoffman to “prioritize victims over criminals.” Yet the actual family members of the victim of Jessie's murder were not asking Louisiana to murder him.

The victim's sister-in-law specifically asked Louisiana not to murder Jessie Hoffman, saying “Executing Jessie Hoffman is not justice in my name, it is the opposite.” The victim's husband refused to attend the state execution and said he is now “indiffer-

ent to the death penalty vs. life in prison without parole.” He also gave another reason for not attending: “Just not really feeling like I need to watch another human being die.” Years before, Jessie Hoffman wrote a statement apologizing to the victims, but Louisiana refused to deliver it to the family. Jessie and the victim's sister-in-law tried to talk by Zoom so Jessie could apologize to her directly, but Louisiana would not allow it.

Nitrogen gas causes death by depriving the body of oxygen, essentially causing suffocation in a phenomenon known as hypoxia. This method is so horrible that all but two states have stopped using nitrogen gas on animals, declaring it inhumane.

As our visit continued, another long-time lawyer arrived. Caroline Tillman, who has been working to save Jessie Hoffman from state murder for 22 years, came directly from federal court in New Orleans. Teams of lawyers tried to stop the state murder of Jessie Hoffman, filing in several state and federal courts. Only the U.S. Supreme Court had not been heard from yet. More prayers were



Caroline Tillman

said. The letter from the sister-in-law asking that the state murder not go forward was read aloud. More prayers.

More than 250 faith leaders had recently signed letters asking Louisiana not to revive the practice of state murder with nitrogen gas. Thousands had called the governor of Louisiana asking for mercy. Vigils supporting Jessie were occurring outside the prison and in several places in New Orleans.

With less than an hour to go before the scheduled murder of Jessie Hoffman, the Warden came in and politely but firmly terminated the lawyers' visit. He refused permission to allow any lawyer to stay and witness the murder of Jessie Hoffman. Only Reverend Reimoku was allowed to remain. After the lawyers were escorted out, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to stop the murder of Mr. Hoffman by a vote of 5-4, one vote short of the 5 votes needed for a stay. The murder of Jessie Hoffman by Louisiana could now begin.

John Simmerman, a journalist with nola.com, was one of two media witnesses allowed to view the execution of Jessie Hoffman. He reports that at 6:21 the ultra-high-grade nitrogen was pumped into the immobilized Mr. Hoffman. The prison draped him in a blanket. His breathing became uneven. His chest rose. He made a jerking motion. His body shook. His fingers twitched. He pulled

at the table. His hands clenched. His breathing slowed. His head moved inside the mask. He jerked slightly around 6:27 and stopped moving. Louisiana officials reported the poison gas was pumped into Jessie Hoffman for 19 minutes until he was pronounced dead. The last view of Jessie Hoffman with his face now uncovered showed "his head was tilted back, teeth exposed in a grimace."

The murder of Jessie Hoffman by Louisiana was now complete.

Samantha Pourciau, who was with Jessie Hoffman on his final day on earth, said: "Tonight, while many in our state cannot afford groceries, the state used countless resources to kill one man. The governor cannot cloak this in fighting for victims, because today we learned that this is not, in fact, what this family wants. This is what the governor wants. This has been in service of no one but the bloodlust of our state government." ☙

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Power

*His glorious resurrection has delivered
us from the power of our enemy.*

— The Book of Common Prayer

It's like this —

You've just come home from the hospital
and you don't know the outcome,
but your sister takes your hand and whispers,
I'm always just a phone call away.

Evil has taken over the airways and streets.
You are afraid to walk out your front door.
Suddenly you say to no one but yourself,
I am somebody. My life matters. God says so.

You ask, *What about that time I was so mean
to X? And, another time, Why didn't I step up
to help when I could have stopped a catastrophe?*
A voice says, *Nothing can cut you off from My love.*

Somehow today, of all days, you find you can say
Thank you from the hospital room, *Thank you*
in the streets while police car lights are flashing,
and *Thank you* when you step up to your mirror.

— J. Stephen Rhodes

Written for Grace Episcopal Cathedral

Steve Rhodes is a Presbyterian minister who has served as a pastor, professor and poet, as well as serving breakfasts at Butler Street with the Open Door Community. He taught and learned with seminary students in Appalachia as well as in Memphis and the lower Mississippi delta. He is currently Canon Poet for Grace Episcopal Cathedral in Charleston, South Carolina. He loves walking in woods, fields and marshes about as much as he loves anything. (www.jstephenrhodes.org.)



Murphy Davis ¡Presente!



One Small Step for Humankind

HB 123 Passes

By Cathy Harmon-Christian

The 2025 Georgia legislative session will be remembered by death penalty abolitionists as the time when Georgia took one step closer to living out its state motto: “Wisdom, Justice, and Moderation.” On May 13, Gov. Brian Kemp signed into law HB 123, a law that protects those with intellectual disability from being sentenced to death. Until now, and despite the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2002 ruling in *Atkins v. Virginia* banning the execution of people with intellectual disability — calling it “cruel and unusual punishment” — Georgia remained the only state in the country that forced defendants to prove their disability “beyond a reasonable doubt” to avoid execution. The new law went into immediate effect.

HB 123 sets a precedent of decency, of truth rather than winning at any cost. It shows that Georgia can show care and concern for the very least among us. Sponsored by Republican Representative Bill Werkheiser, HB 123 passed both chambers of the Georgia legislature in extraordinary fashion — unanimously in the House, and only one nay vote in the Senate (this cast by the ultra right-wing, MAGA mouthpiece Colton Moore, whose occupation is auctioneer). Until now, Georgia had been the only state that required juries to decide whether someone is intellectually disabled “beyond a reasonable doubt” and to determine both guilt and intellectual disability at the same time. HB 123 essentially lowers the standard of proof from “beyond a reasonable doubt” to “a preponderance of the evidence.” In Georgia’s history of the death penalty, no capital defendant has ever successfully cleared the State’s high “beyond a reasonable doubt” bar required for proving they are intellectually disabled.

HB 123’s proponents cited several cases where intellectually disabled prisoners were executed in Georgia since 2002. Most recently, Georgia found itself under the public glare in 2024 when Willie Pye



Calvin Kimbrough

*Vigil for Life at the Death of Warren Hill, January 27, 2015.
Murphy Davis speaks with the media at the Georgia Capitol.*

was executed despite evidence he was intellectually disabled. He had an IQ of 68. In another case over a decade ago, Warren Hill was put to death despite having an IQ of 70. “Warren’s case is such a perfect example of why (HB 123) is necessary,” testified Michael Admirand, staff attorney with the Southern Center for Human Rights.

Until now, Georgia had been the only state that required juries to decide whether someone is intellectually disabled “beyond a reasonable doubt” and to determine both guilt and intellectual disability at the same time.

“Every doctor who examined him, even the state doctors, agreed that he was intellectually disabled, but he was still executed. That’s why we need to fix the law.”

Prosecutors testified against HB 123 and were “adamantly opposed” to the part of the bill that mandated a separate pretrial hearing to determine whether a defendant was intellectually disabled or not. “This procedural change in the bill would all but kill the death penalty [in Georgia],” one district attorney testified. Another DA testified that adding a pretrial hearing would only serve to “drag out capital cases further.”

Democrat Rep. Esther Panitch refuted the prosecutors’ arguments. “I’m not understanding how this (a pretrial hearing) is any different from any other pretrial proceeding that might delay an ultimate resolution or ultimate adjudication,” Panitch said. “But we’re dealing with the death penalty here, and so I’m okay taking those extra

steps to make sure that if you’re going to impose the death penalty it’s for the right circumstances.”

Charlotte Densmore, public policy director for the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities, testified during hearings that it was time for Georgia to “get in line with the national standard of how we treat people with disabilities.” “Georgia has fallen behind on that front,” Densmore said. “No one in Georgia has been found to have an intellectual disability in a death penalty case in over 20 years but we know that’s not the case. We’ve

executed people with IQs of 70. Some of these folks have the mental capacity of a juvenile. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled juveniles should not be executed. So why are we executing the intellectually disabled?"

Following Gov. Kemp's signing of HB 123 on May 13, Southern Center for Human Rights executive director Terrica Ganzy saluted the many organizations that rallied behind HB 123 — most prominently Georgians For Alternatives to the Death Penalty — with this statement: "In our work we know that progress doesn't happen overnight. The signing of HB 123 into law is a testament to the persistence, steadfastness and community behind this effort. This law will undoubtedly save lives. We are thankful we had Rep. Werkheiser as a champion and partner in this monumental victory." ♦

(Georgia Recorder reporter Jill Nolin and John Cole Vodicka contributed to this article.)

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Mary Catherine Johnson

Georgia Rep. Bill Werkheiser (R-District 157), sponsor of HB 123, and supporters, after the bill's passage in the House of Representatives.

Inevitable

My peace I give to you, not as the world gives.
— John 14:27

We each went our own way
back to our cookfires and fish nets,
clatter of swords and horse hooves.

Streets empty of the crowds,
we met in secret rooms,
ears cocked for the sound of his voice.

Some of us saw.
One of us even touched.

Here is the thing — none of us could shut up.
We could not stop dancing.
Singing turned into shouting.

It had to happen. They stoned one of us,
started hunting us down.

They could not understand.
We had learned how to love our life.

— J. Stephen Rhodes
Written for Grace Episcopal Cathedral

Steve Rhodes is a poet, scholar and essayist who lives in Charleston, South Carolina. His collection of poems, *The Time I Didn't Know What to Do Next*, is available from bookstores and Amazon. (www.jstephenrhodes.org.)

Voting Rights Act

By Nibs Stroupe

This summer marks the 60th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, passed in August of that year, riding on the strength of the Selma to Montgomery marches earlier that year. I say “marches” because the first one in March was violently interrupted by Alabama state troopers as the marchers, led by John Lewis and Hosea Williams, crossed over the Edmund Pettis Bridge. The sight of those troopers attacking non-violent marchers, broadcast on the national news, impelled President Lyndon Johnson to move the bill forward. It also gave him the energy to face down a Republican filibuster in the Senate, with minority leader Everett Dirksen also being disgusted with what he saw on that Bloody Sunday. Martin Luther King, Jr. and others came to lead the final Selma to Montgomery March on March 21, reaching Montgomery on March 24.

The passage of the Voting Rights Act brought an end to neo-slavery in the United States. It required “pre-clearance” by the U.S. Justice Department before any voting changes could be made, especially by states that were in the old Confederacy. Normally, the period between 1890 (when white Southerners reconstituted white supremacy in the South) and 1965 is called “Jim Crow,” but as Doug Blackmon points out in his fine book *Slavery By Another Name*, the real name for that period should be “neo-slavery.” He indicated that neo-slavery ended in 1945 with the return of Black Americans who had fought in World War II, determined not to settle back into neo-slavery. While the determination of those Black veterans was essential to the success of the Civil Rights Movement, my sense is that it would take 20 more years before the hold of neo-slavery would be loosened in the South. Having grown up in the South in that twenty-year period, I can attest to the continuing power of neo-slavery in

the South from 1945-1965. Black people were not even second-class citizens in the South that I grew up in — they continued to be seen by white people like me as “sub-human.”

The Voting Rights Act revolutionized the South, so much so that the power of white supremacy sought ways to mitigate its power. The same white supremacy that spawned the Civil War still flows in the heart of white American culture. As Heather Cox Richardson noted in her April 9 *Letters from an American*, this impetus is



AJC | Mike Luckovich

deep within us who are classified as white. She quotes pro-slavery adherent and slave owner George Fitzhugh of Virginia, writing in his book *Cannibals All! Or Slaves Without Masters* in 1857: “We do not agree with the authors of the Declaration of Inde-

We are now once again in a time of retrenchment from the idea of equality, and Trump’s leadership seeks to take us back to the days of the pre-1950s, when white, male supremacy was the law and order of the land, and when everyone agreed that it should be so.

pendence, that governments ‘derive their just powers from the consent of the governed.’” “All governments must originate in force, and be continued by force.” There were 18,000 people in his county and only 1,200 could vote, he said, “But we twelve hundred ... never asked and never intend to ask the consent of the sixteen thousand

eight hundred whom we govern.”

This sentiment of white Southerners prevailed in the years after the Civil War as they sought to strip the power of the Constitutional amendments, especially the 15th Amendment, which guaranteed the right to vote to Black men. The Democrats in power in the South carried out this effort, and by 1890, neo-slavery had become both the law and the spirit of the South.

The Republicans, who took on the mantle of white supremacy after President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Act (1965), quickly adapted to this attempt to revolutionize the country and move us toward the idea of equality. Richard Nixon ran again for president in 1968, using his “Southern Strategy” to seek to win over white Southerners (and other white voters) alienated by the Democratic movement toward equal rights. Ronald Reagan picked up the white supremacy mantle when he ran for president in 1980. He opened his campaign in Neshoba County, Mississippi, where three civil rights workers had been kidnapped and murdered in 1964. His mantra, “Get the federal government out of our lives,” resonated deeply with white Southerners and others who felt

“forced” to allow Black people and others to seek to move into mainstream American life.

Bush 1 (George H.W.) used the infamous “Willie Horton” ad in his campaign to win the presidency in 1988, an ad so odious

that its creator, Lee Atwater, repudiated it before he died and had to face his Maker. Bush 2 (“W”) continued the legacy of using racialized approaches to turn out the white vote for Republicans. And the Trumpian captivity of the Republican party began after the election of African American Barack Obama as president. The anti-Black

Tea Party movement emerged in 2010 and led to Donald Trump's not-so-subtle "Make America Great Again" movement. What the slogan really meant is "Make America White Again," which Trump is now seeking to implement in his second term as president.

I do not mean to indicate that the Democrats are innocent here. They were the main purveyors of neo-slavery and white supremacy up until the mid-1960s. They stripped away the hard-won rights of Black people in Reconstruction, and the first Southerner elected president after the Civil War, Woodrow Wilson, re-segregated the federal government in 1913. They controlled the governments of the South in the earlier part of the 20th century and maintained a harsh neo-slavery. The names that ring throughout the racist history of the South — Faubus, Barnett, Wallace, Patterson, Talmadge — all were Democrats. Indeed, the legacy of the racist Democrats led many Black people to vote Republican until 1960, when Bobby Kennedy persuaded "Daddy" King to switch to the Democrats and vote for JFK. That switch brought Kennedy to the White House.

The Voting Rights Act flourished for almost 50 years, beginning to bring some equality in American life and greatly increasing the number of Black people elected to office. Its very success made it a continuing target of white people and in 2013, the official evisceration of the Act began when SCOTUS, now dominated by a slim majority of conservatives, voted 5-4 in *Shelby v. Holder* to strike down one of the main enforcement provisions of the Voting Rights Act. That case arose from Alabama, which has always been one of the strongholds of white supremacy.

We are now once again in a time of retrenchment from the idea of equality, and Trump's leadership seeks to take us back to the days of the pre-1950s, when white, male supremacy was the law and order of the land, and when everyone agreed that it should be so. His attack on DEI is a blatant attempt to reassert white, male supremacy, and many Republican states are passing laws forbidding the teaching of the history that I am writing in this article. The SAVE Act just passed by the House in April seeks to take us back to that time by instituting laws which make it much

harder to vote. I don't believe that it will make it through the Senate, but I should not underestimate the power of white supremacy in our culture. It has a long and deep and shameful power, and it is hard to imagine that it will ever be erased from America.

This 60th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act makes it clear that there is a



Bruce Davidson

powerful impulse toward equity and justice in the streams of our cultural consciousness, and all of us should remember that and celebrate that. We should also be aware that an equally potent power resides and abides in our cultural consciousness — the belief in white, male supremacy. The struggle between equality and race has defined much of our American story. In a grim time like this when the Trumpian way seems so strong, let us recall the great

cloud of witnesses who have gone before us, who have shown us the path to what is great among us — the idea that all people are created equal. That is an idea that is at the heart of our history, but as George Fitzhugh reminded us almost 170 years ago, it is an idea that has been greatly resisted and continues to be resisted in our time.

In this struggle, let us take up the mantle of the Voting Rights Act, take up the mantle of equality and justice. It will require creativity, resistance and even defiance. In our work, let us be inspired by the song story from Ella Baker (creative resister and defier in the Civil Rights Movement — an article for another issue), as portrayed in these words from "Ella's Song," written by Bernice Johnson Reagon of Sweet Honey in the Rock:

"We who believe in freedom cannot rest. We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes." Let us work for that time to be coming closer. ✦

Nibs Stroupe is a longtime friend of the Open Door, retired pastor and author of Deeper Waters: Sermons for a New Vision and She Made a Way: Mother and Me in a Deep South World. He and Catherine Meeks are authors of Passionate for Justice, a book about the life and witness of Ida B. Wells for our time. He is managing editor of Hospitality. He writes a weekly blog at www.nibsnotes.blogspot.com. (nibs.stroupe@gmail.com)

The Box

Compiled by Ed Loring



Rita Corbin

While there is a lower class
I am in it
While there is a criminal element
I am of it
While there is a soul in prison
I am not free

— Eugene V. Debs



David Payne

Love is the only solution
And love comes with Socialism
Capitalism Kills

— Eduard Loring

Street Time: Eduard and Kamal

A Beautiful Encounter

By Eduard Loring

I

Violence has found a nesting place in Baltimore. What about where you live? Murphy Davis lived in this city for 3½ years, I have been here 8 so far. On several occasions violence has found me or I it — the bastard, though endemic to our species. Dr. Martin Luther King, a major mentor, taught me to practice coercive non-violence. He learned the method from Gandhi, Howard Thurman and Reinhold Niebuhr, and King acted on their teaching. I am no pacifist. To step into sidewalk violence is my manner of discipleship. “I am on the battlefield for my Lord” is a favorite hymn that we sang often at African American First Iconium Baptist Church in Atlanta, where Murphy and I were members for years. There we began to follow the Black Jesus.

Baltimore is “charm city,” our symbol is the rat. Baltimore has been an annual contender for the top city in murders. We have killed each other at the rate of 300 a year. Guns, Guns, Guns. My Baltimore is outside the area of most of that street violence. In my area of Hamilton, we experience little sidewalk violence, though we experience disruptions. My location is where I can serve with love and grow the common good, aka “The Beloved Community.”

During my Baltimore years I have intervened a number of times in sidewalk violence. Once when a man was pushing a mother and infant around trying to make them get in his car. Jumping into the fray, I screamed and howled and got his attention. His anger then focused on me. She got away and ran into her apartment (3 doors down from the ODC). He spit on me and said a few nasty epithets, got in his car and drove off. The mother and baby moved away a week later. That’s hardly creating peace, but it is stopping violence.

We created and served coffee and food at the Welcome Table at Upton Subway Station until we ended it on



Ricardo Levins Morales

March 12, 2020 when we went into “Covid Lockdown.” Once while serving, a regular troublemaker threw coffee in my face and slugged me in the chest. Our guests surrounded me with care and concern, and the white assailant on Black turf ran.

Not fast enough. Red, a sympathetic drug dealer who kept a caring eye on us, caught the poor guy in the nearby alley and beat the hell out of him. Next serving day, Red came to check on me. He said with voice raised, “I will not stand for anyone hassling goddamn Christians! I support goddamn Christians.” M.L.K. teaches that violence creates more violence unless there is nonviolent intervention. Point well made.

One more vignette, though I have more. Driving down Northern Parkway from Hannah, Jason and Michaela’s home, I saw across the divided road at a very busy intersection a man screaming and hitting his sweetheart. Next U-turn, I U-turned. She got away, fleeing to the other side of

Northern Parkway with him in pursuit. So, another quick U-turn. And I’ll be diddledamned, she went back again to where he had been pushing her up against a chainlink fence. Another U-turn, and I got to them. Parked the car and got out. The traffic was Atlanta-like. As I arrived, she got loose, ran again. He pursued, but he stepped into the street and was sideswiped by a car. No one stopped to help — instead, angry people were honking their horns and raising their fists because they were forced to stop.

I helped him out of the street and over to the covered bus stop. His shirt was torn, his back scraped and there was smeared blood around his ear, but the blood did not appear to come from inside his head. He lay down on the sidewalk but would not agree to my calling 911. After all the stares and cars rushing past, an African man, wonderful and loving, stopped and helped. We did call 911. The ambulance and the police arrived in 15 minutes. We remained together until he was in the ambulance and departed. Where did his sweetheart go? Where are they today?

Baltimore is “charm city,” our symbol is the rat. My location is where I can serve with love and grow the common good, aka “The Beloved Community.”

II Now

I journey to BWI Airport to fetch Hannah and Janet returning from Las Vegas: a nurse educator’s conference. Then on to Mom’s Grocery for my week’s shopping. I park. A mentally ill man, Mike, whom I met before, is screaming and is confusing traffic in the parking lot. I go to Mike to walk him across the street. He screams at me and runs away.

Getting my shopping bags out of the car, I head toward Mom’s when suddenly, a man jumps out of a bent up and beat down car, hollering to a woman walking away. I will not share what he said, just imagine misogynist gutter filth. The language of rage firing out of the guts of this

abandoned disposable man.

He got back in his car, and I stood 150 feet away and watched. By this time, Mike, out of sight, was screaming. His utter pain and horror of unaddressed mental illness remained the background music for this short duration.

The woman was still in sight walking away, and her tormentor got out of his car again and stood as high as he could, and repeated his message to her. He got back into his car and sat there. "Odd," said I to me, "He is not chasing her." I stood and watched him, Mike always screaming. It wasn't long before he got out of his car and walked to me.

"What ya looking at?"

"Hello, I'm Eduard, how are you?"

"What do you want?"

"Nothing. I would like to meet you."

"Shit." He walked back to his car.

I walked to Mom's. Great food.

Abundance. The good American life as advertised on all the screens. And, man, let me tell you — I took the opportunity to fill my grocery cart. I, too, live the good American life which leads toward moral and physical death.

I'll be damned. (I'm doomed, not damned.) He is still sitting in his beat-up car. Putting my fine foods in my hybrid (wishing for an electric car, but no way), I decide to "break down a dividing wall." (Ephesians and Robert Frost). I go to him and speak. He will not roll down his window. I ask, "May I help you in any way?" I cannot hear his answer. I point to my hearing aids, I cannot hear. A 200-second minute passes. I stand and wait. He rolls down his window. "Any way I can be helpful?" I ask. "I don't trust you," was his answer.

Using the drill I do in such encounters, I respond, "Hell yes. You should never trust a white person until they earn your trust. Do you know white history? Genocide, slavery, war. Listen to Putin's threats on nuclear weapons, only one people ever used them — the white man on people of color. Look man, I've worked with homeless poor and prisoners all my life and in the Black Freedom Movement. I can 'see.' I see you. You are homeless and probably living in this car."

"Okay, that's what I wanted to hear."

My guess was that he did not

pursue his partner because the gas tank was near empty. He was parked — nowhere to go, and no means to move.

"Let me fill up your gas tank."

"Okay."

I followed him to a nearby Royal Farms. He put the pump on automatic and walked toward me. He is 5'8", round head, broken front tooth, short wooly hair. He wore a black faux leather jacket creased and torn over a black t-shirt. His pink high top shoes were falling apart, black unwashed pants. He approached me with a smile. We bumped fists.

"I'm Eduard, what's your name?"

"Jamal," I thought he said.

"No, Kamal, Jamal with a K."

"Got it."

Born in Baltimore, Kamal is one of thousands — abandoned, disposable. Not forgotten because they are never known. Living, always, on the edge of jail, violence, death.

Open our eyes. Clean out our ears.
Stop. Look. Listen to the cry of the poor.
Jesus comes in a stranger's guise.

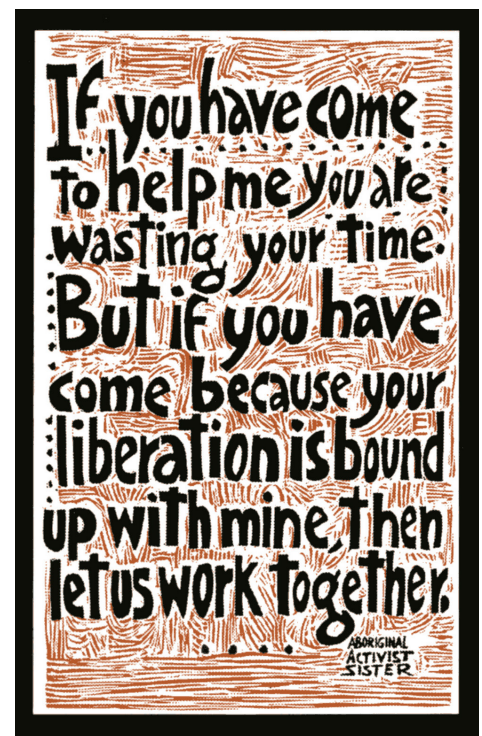
"What ya doing these days?" I venture to ask.

"Just looking around."

Kamal looks at the gas pump. When it reaches \$30.00, he tells me he must get in his car to check the gas gauge. "Wait," I say, "there is an automatic stop when your tank is full."

"Yeah? I've never had a full tank of gas before." White, middle class Eduard is taken by surprise. "Never filled a tank before," I think, "impossible." How little this white man knows of poverty and the life of never having enough. And that's after 51 years of living and working among the poorest of poor.

The pump clicks off at \$39.99. Kamal puts up the hose. Thanks me.



Ricardo Levins Morales

"Here," I reach toward him with two Lincolns. "For your supper." We bump fists, get in our cars. I drive toward home. Getting into his ruined car in seedy clothes, Kamal is already home.

Grateful am I that scripture and prayer are powers in my life. A burden in my life is that I know why there is poverty in the USA. No study needed. Open our eyes. Clean out our ears. Stop. Look. Listen to the cry of the poor. Jesus comes in a stranger's guise. ✠

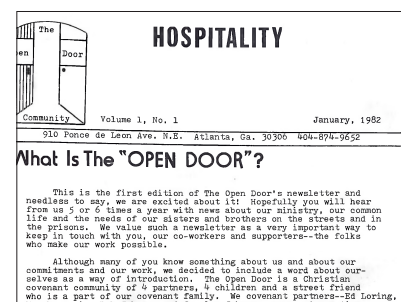
Eduard Nuessner Loring is an Activist/ Advocate/Ally at the Open Door Community in Baltimore. Pronouns: he, him, his. (edloring@opendoorcommunity.org)

HOSPITALITY

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Grace and Peaces of Mail

Hi Ed,

Just received and read your "Street Time..." piece. Oh, it both breaks and heals my heart. Most telling line: "Not forgotten because they are never known." Indeed.

Thanks, Ed,
Peace,

Nancy Berson
Oakland, California

Dear Ed,

We enjoyed all the articles about you in the last print issue of *Hospitality*. Thanks also for the letters and pictures of recent activities in Baltimore. I've been re-reading *Open Door Reader* and been impressed with all your witness for many years! Keep going on!

Love, Old "Sage" Geezer John
I ain't dead yet!
John Sallstrom
Milledgeville, Georgia

Dear Ed and *Hospitality*:

Thanks for raising questions that few others Raise!

Tim Maxa
Lenox, Iowa

Nibs & Ed,

Great job with the first electronic issue of *Hospitality*. Thank You!

Jim Martin
Atlanta, Georgia



Undocumented 1980 | Malaquias Montoya

Dear Mr. Ed Loring,

First and foremost, I want to humbly apologize for taking so long to write you back! I was suffering through a mosquito infestation, trying to advocate for myself, fighting with the prison administration (depressed).

That turned into my current reality — National Guards in the facility because the COs went on strike. I cannot say that it has been easy, but the fact that I'm alive is a blessing.

First, I want to thank you for the photo; it did help through the rough times. Please do not think that I do not appreciate your time and efforts. Also, I appreciate you getting the thoughts in my mind into *Hospitality*; seeing my poem in Poetry Corner was an early birthday gift. I turned 44 right along with *Open Door*, so the blessings are in the signs! Have to say; "Congrats," to you & everyone who keep *Open Door* running.

I am an African American from Crown Heights, Brooklyn. Please tell Mr. Nibs Stroupe I said "Thank you for getting my poem edited & published."

We have been on lockdown since Feb 21, and I don't know when we'll get off, but as long as we have people like *Open Door*, they can never incarcerate us mentally! I will keep in touch, and keep reading and writing (Thanks for the *Bag of Snakes* book Mr. Ed). I pray this letter finds you in good health and spirits.

Sincerely,

Desmen Best
Georgia prisoner

HOSPITALITY

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A Bag of Snakes

*Selected Writings on Prison
and the Death Penalty*



Murphy Davis and
Edward Loring
Edited by Barry Lee Burnside

HOSPITALITY *prays*

Prayer is the heart of a genuine Christian radicalism. — Ron Ferguson



You have heard that it was said,
“You shall love your neighbor (friends) and hate your enemy.”
But I say to you,
“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you ...”
— Matthew 5:43-44

A Prayer for Loving Our Enemies

O God of love and justice:

Jesus taught us to love our enemies in spite of our inclinations to hate them.

But it is so hard for many of us to love people like our current president and his cabinet!
We loathe...

the ways he disregards our national constitution,
the ways he so blatantly lies to get his own way,
the ways he uses the authority of his office to bully those who disagree with him,
the ways he rewards billionaires at the expense of those struggling to survive,
the ways he eliminates programs created to care for the poor or disabled,
the ways he employs your holy name in his quest to become our “king.”

So please, Lord God, help us...

find our voices in the face of evil,
oppose injustices that seem so overwhelming,
reform our political processes so that they are instruments of integrity, honor and truth.

Restore our hope...

that we shall find the courage you gave your prophets of old,
that we shall be your agents of godly justice,
that we shall repent from past actions in which we have betrayed you,
that we shall be your faithful disciples, even praying for our enemies.

Indeed, You, O God, are our reason to trust in the future.

You are our wisdom, our truth.

You are our leader, our King of kings, our Lord of lords.

We pray for your gift of vision amidst our blindness and chaos;

for You to unite us with our enemies so we work together for your peace and justice;
for You to shine your light amidst our darkness and despair.

May we be your faithful disciples in all that we say and do, even as we pray for our enemies.
AMEN.

— Lee Carroll

Lee Carroll is an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and Associate Professor Emeritus of Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Georgia. He is the current chair of the Board of Directors of the Open Door Community. (lcarroll@ix.netcom.com)