



From the Remaining OBS Founders



It is impossible to chronicle the vast history of the Organization for Black Struggle in a few pages. There are so many campaigns, events, protests, forums, projects, travels, connections and relationships that could have been featured. There are some which were not part of our written institutional memory or which have faded from our personal memories.

As young cadre in the Congress of African People, we were steeped in the study and struggles that resulted in transformative change. We learned how to organize coalitions and build institutions to advance our people's struggle. We were groomed to be international citizens as people of African descent. As part of our training to build Black organization and institutions, we helped to found OBS, the Rowan Community Center and the Infrared Rockers.

Amilcar Cabral teaches us not to claim easy victories, and being an organization of and for the working class, there have been highs and lows. No victory has been easy. Our goal of this commemorative issue is to give you a glimpse of those struggles and the resulting hard-fought victories. None of those people's victories could have been possible without the unwavering and enduring support of family, supporters and allies. OBS has interacted with thousands over the years through meetings, canvassing, conferences and other gatherings of resistance and strategizing.

When asked what we're most proud of, each of us had a different answer but they were all connected: the election of Freeman Bosley, Jr., the first Black mayor, the Black Liberation & Technology project, our Youth Cultural Theater, the outcomes of the Marilyn Banks murder by St. Louis cop Joseph Ferrario that ultimately led to the return of control of the police department to its citizens, influencing the Dr. Martin Luther King Holiday Committee to be more community-oriented, and the freedom of Ellen Reasonover, our first high-profile case of wrongful conviction.

There has been no significant issue facing Black people in this city that OBS has not been involved in. The impact on people, policies and institutions has been profound and indelible. Our branches are wide and our roots are deep. Our capacity may ebb and flow, but never our commitment to the liberation of our people. The following pages will give you a glimpse into the life and work of OBS over the last 45 years. We hope you see the seamless flow of our organizing and commitment from the 1960's forward.

The struggle continues, and so will OBS.

Forward together, backward never !

Charles Babatu Murphy, Kalimu Endesha & Jamala Rogers



Before the official founding of OBS, its members were active in many different struggles. They participated in the 1970 protest rally against program cutbacks organized by Rev. Charles Koen and the Cairo Black United Front. They were active in the campaign to re-open the Homer G. Phillips Hospital that began in 1979.

The Building of a Grassroots Organization



The vision of OBS is to contribute to the creation of a society free of all forms of exploitation and oppression. It was a vision influenced by the Black Women's United Front who were dedicated to the "abolition of every possibility of oppression & exploitation."

The foundational pillars are the prison industrial complex, workers' rights, women's rights and youth development. The areas of work were organic, flowing from the organizing work its founding members were already organizing around. Their commitment informed its mission: to build a movement that fights for political empowerment, economic justice and the cultural dignity of the African American community, especially the Black working class.

The OBS motto is "Black People on the Move!" but it can't be aimless movement. The goal is to be moving towards the fullest participation of our people in a democratic society and the human rights that go with it.

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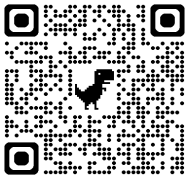
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Acknowledgments

The Organization for Black Struggle would like to express our gratitude for all those who have been on the 45-year journey with us. To our members—past, current and those who have joined the ancestors—for their contributions to the freedom struggles. To our supporters who have given us their time, ideas, energies, constructive criticisms and money to ensure our ability to continue the fight. To our partners and allies who have stood with us in battle. To our funders who understood our vision and who made an investment to strengthen and expand our programs and campaigns. To anyone who believed in our mission and did what they could to push our forward. We are here because of you. Asante sana (thank you very much).

This is No Time Not to be Organized

OBS invites you to join the organization as an active, support or sustaining member as we face the unique challenges of global white supremacy on a local level. It is imperative that we seek unity on new levels to fight for a democratic society in the U.S. and in St. Louis. We know another world is possible.



Visit us at www.obs-stl.org or scan the QR code.



YourStory is OurStory

Do you have an experience with OBS from over the years? Be a part of our archival project. We'd love to hear your story. Scan the barcode below to complete the form for your interview.



DISCLAIMER on Photo Credits and Accuracy

To our movement photographers (Wiley Price II, Maurice Meredith, Erica Brooks, Bob Williams, Philip Dietch, and others), over the years we have lost the name credit on photos you may have given us permission to use. We do understand the importance of your work, so please give us some grace.

To the readers, we did not do a good job of dating photos or documents in our early days. The quality of photographs has improved over time. If you think you should have been included in a particular project or campaign but were not, it’s because the resolution was poor for many of the photos we wished we could have used. If you recognize incorrect dates of events or names of people, please let us know asap. We can correct on the electronic version that will be uploaded to the websites of OBS and the Youth Council for Positive Development in the future.

The Anniversary Celebrations, Education, Youth, and Health will be covered in the commemorative edition of the Youth Council for Positive Development. (Part II). These areas were often shared activities and campaigns of both OBS and the YCPD.

Congratulations!

Marilyn Lorenz & David Weinkauff



Al Lumpkins was the first OBS Chair and Jamala Rogers was the Co-Chair. When General Motors shipped Al and other autoworkers to the Bowling Green, KY plant, Jamala stepped into the leadership role. OBS became a Black, woman-led organization, a rarity at that time among Black organizations.

OBS had studied the organizations of the past to glean from them the lessons and practices on which to build a solid foundation. This included groups like the Black Panther Party (BPP), Student Non-Violent Coordinating Council (SNCC), A.C.T.I.O.N., and the Congress of African People (CAP). Their histories provided valuable experiences for the radical pathway forward.

Although the Organization for Black Struggle was founded in 1980, it was the previous tumultuous decades that shaped and propelled it into formation. Founding members and supporters were active during the 1960s and 1970s in groups such as People Fighting Repression, Missourians Struggling Inside Missouri Prisons, CAP as well as Marxist-Leninist collectives, unions, student associations, public housing tenant organizations and cultural ensembles.

OBS members come from diverse backgrounds; the majority are Black and working class. White anti-racist organizers join with the understanding they must follow and respect Black leadership. All are united around the mission, goals, and activities of the organization. The challenge is always how to harness the limited time, values and energies of members and supporters with their unlimited talents and skills into the organizing work.

Key to OBS's viability is its vision, uncompromising principles, tenacity, and deep roots in the community. Along with the fight against racism, patriarchy, and classism, has been the unrelenting demand for respect of Black people and their culture, history, contributions, and institutions.

The 60's were a mixed bag of government repression and concessions to the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. The FBI's CounterIntelligence Program (COINTELPRO) wreaked havoc on leaders and their organizations. Aggressive tactics of the government in a search and destroy mission decimated groups like the Black Panther Party nationally and the Zulu 1200 locally. As head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, J. Edgar Hoover would reign terror on resistance movements in this country for almost half a century.

The 70's were marked by an economic recession that hit Black working classes families harder than their white counterparts. President Richard Nixon was the first to declare a War on Drugs, a code term for war on Black and Brown communities. The victories of the previous period were blocked or dismantled with a whitelash similar to the Reconstruction Period after slavery. While the rest of the country was struggling to dig itself out of an economic ditch, the Black working class was digging itself out of a gorge.

There was an urgency to fill the vacuum of Black, radical leadership that could boldly speak and act—independent of government or corporate structures. A group of new activists and veteran organizers understood that there was no organization seeking to organize the Black working class to defend its existence and its human rights. This was a challenging period on several levels. It was from this abyss of darkness that OBS was born in 1980.

The Organization for Black Struggle is celebrating its 45th anniversary in 2025. Its legacy is a testament to its influence on the political, cultural and social life of St. Louis. Thousands have been touched by their organizing work in the classrooms, the workplaces, in the union halls, in the board rooms and in the streets. It respects the historic Black, radical traditions laid down by past freedom fighters. It is truly a Servant of the People.



What Keeps OBS Grounded

► A Black Value System

Members of the Congress of African People brought with them the Nguzo Saba or Seven Principles of Kwanzaa. The principles are a daily practice that serves as guidelines for individual and communal interactions.

► A Critique of Capitalism

OBS is anti-capitalist, a belief that is embedded in its vision to contribute to the creation of a society free of all forms of exploitation and oppression. These systems of oppression (racial and gendered) and their models (neoliberalism) must be fully understood by organizers.

► A Culture of Summation

OBS has an internal process for summing up its campaigns, programs and projects so that we learn and grow together, becoming more effective in our organizing.

► Training and Study

Study and discussion is a necessary aspect of organizing and understanding the systems of oppression. Collective and principled discussion helps to raise our levels of consciousness and unity. Along with training components to enhance our skills, the goal is to be better thinkers, writers and organizers.

► A Working Class Ethic

OBS members punched time clocks and worked on assembly lines at their jobs. Time was a valuable commodity and not to be wasted if members were to have time for their own liberation. Discipline shaped a workstyle that reflected a serious rejection of mediocrity. OBS has a reputation of consistency and reliability.



Sistahs Talkin' Back (STB) hosted a session exploring alternatives to capitalist transactions. Chinyere Oteh, founder of the Cowry Shell Collective, explained how Collective members exchange services using time and skills as currency.



OBS has always been in support of reproductive justice, a term created by Black feminists. We fight for the right of Black women to have power over their bodies. Anti-choice conservatives launched a racist campaign associating abortions with genocide in 2010. Our partner SisterSong convened Black-women-led organizations and launched the *Trust Black Women* campaign. Billboards like the one above were placed directly in Black neighborhoods and became the site of protest rallies. A similar billboard in St. Louis suffered significant damage and was permanently taken down. In the first year of *Trust Black Women*, the billboard campaign was defeated along with a restrictive anti-abortion bill. *Trust Black Women* remains a rallying call to assert that Black women's experiences, voices and bodies *will* be respected.

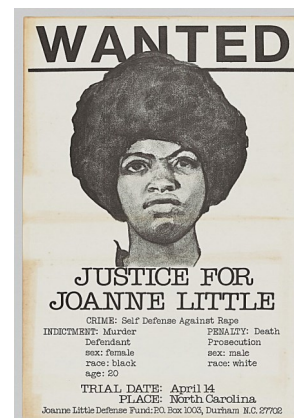


Black women and allies responded to the #MuteRKelley national campaign. When R. Kelly performed at a local venue in 2018, OBS and others were there to greet him. A long-time sexual predator, Kelly was finally convicted in 2021 and 2022.



You strike a woman, you strike a rock*

OBS was no stranger to public housing. The Congress of African People (CAP) and People Fighting Repression (PFR) investigated police violence going down in public housing. Members and their families lived in public housing. That put members directly in community with some of the fiercest women warriors in the City of St. Louis—tenant organizers in Pruitt-Igoe, Carr Square Village, Darst-Webbe, Peabody, Cochran, and The Vaughn. Sistahs like Jean King, Loretta Hall and Mary Ross who captured the nation's attention with a rent strike were our teachers before we knew what feminism was. The successful rent strike reshaped federal legislation around public housing. The concept, from protest to policy, is one that has informed OBS' strategy and tactics. Protests can be effective tactics if they are connected to a strategic goal.



The women in grassroots organizations of the 60s and 70s rarely held leadership or shared power, yet they were the backbone of the movements. Their political development and self-confidence suffered, and OBS did not want to repeat these failed practices. The fight against sexism and misogyny were central to the organization's vision against all forms of oppression and economic exploitation.

The women were also involved in campaigns like the ones to Free Angela Davis in 1970 and Joan Little in 1975. Both were political prisoners in different ways. Davis had been framed for murder and put on the FBI's Most Wanted List. Little faced a murder charge for killing a white jail guard who tried to rape her. Her case garnered the attention of both Black and women's groups internationally. Little made history when she became the first woman to be acquitted of murder in self-defense against a sexual assault.

Women in CAP and the National Welfare Rights Organization were the backbone behind the founding of the Black Women's United Front in 1975. BWUF was committed to "abolition of every possibility of oppression & exploitation. When CAP embraced Marxism-Leninism ideology, the historical critique of capitalism led to a sharper analysis of patriarchy and gender oppression.

The deeper understanding of the crippling impact of capitalism on women of color has also sharpened the patriarchal contradictions in personal relationships, in organizations and in the broader community. The conflicts would be ongoing and the struggle for women's rights would be welcomed by a woman-led organization and women across social justice movements.

*the phrase is taken from a freedom song popularized by women during the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa

Strike a woman (cont.)

Radical Black women soundly rejected the feminism of the predominantly white women’s movement. Inside the CAP’s Social Organization and other Black formations, women were exploring how feminism affected their lives as well as their roles in their respective organizations. OBS studied the Combahee Rive Collective Statement and other writings by Black feminists who were deepening the new theory.

By the time the United Nations’ Decade of Women launched in 1985, OBS women were ready to raise the banner of Black feminism on a world stage and unite with women of African descent from around the world. They participated in many the women’s international conferences that harnessed the power of women for global change.

OBS is against all forms of violence against women. It participated in "Take Back the Night" marches in the late 80's. The group participated in a rape awareness campaign by Black psychologist and feminist, Dr. Aaronnette White. It took out a full page ad in the St. Louis American newspaper calling for open dialog on rape in the Black community. The organization has given personal support. to its female members and other sisters who have been victims of domestic abuse, rape, sexual harassment, and discrimination. OBS joined forces with other community groups in shutting down the Red Fez Lounge when its negligent owner refused to open its doors to a female customer who was subsequently raped. (cont.)

In photo to left, Dr. White (far left) talked to Affirmations participants (1991)



STB convened planning meetings to support Marissa Alexander and other victims of partner abuse (2014). She was convicted and sentenced to 20 years in prison. Continued efforts by the Free Marissa Now campaign forced her early release in 2017. In photo below, OBS brother assists with childcare during an Affirmations program.



5 Dr. Afua Bromley explained the benefits of holistic health and healing at Affirmations! She administered acupuncture techniques for a sister’s chronic back problems.



Panelists Rev. Cassandra Gould, Attorney Denise Lieberman (MOVPC) and Tishaura Jones discussed the power of women voters in 2020. Jones became the first Black, female mayor of St. Louis in 2021.



Local artist Holly Roe shared her rendering of Time Magazine’s Woman of the Year (Tarana Burke) with Affirmation participants.(2018).

Strike a women (cont)

OBS understands the need for women's ongoing development and the freedom to participate in the political and social life of the community. Most OBS activities have an on-site childcare component to ensure consistent involvement of the sisters. The brothers are trained to conduct childcare as one way to support the women. The model was adapted from the CAP prototype and has become a mainstay in the movement.

Early activities of the women’s unit were the celebration of the March 8 International Women's Day with other coalition partners. OBS women moved on to sponsor "Affirmations!" Since 1990, women have come to “Affirmations!” to engage in lively political discussions, to get health screenings and information, to network, to support sister-vendors and to get pampered. The motto was “celebrating the lives of women in a cultural and political way.”

In 1998, OBS women started a discussion group to deepen their understanding of the conditions working class Black women face. The women named the session Sistahs Talkin' Back, a title of a writing by Black feminist, bell hooks. At STB sessions, there is political education as well as personal support for one another.

OBS and its women support the Equality Rights Amendment and any other legislation or constitutional amendments that protect and advance women’s rights and power over their bodies. Using a feminist lens is essential to organizing for women’s liberation.



OBS is a working-class organization and worker solidarity is a natural component. It is built on the demands of predecessor groups like ACTION to make "better paying jobs" a priority. In subsequent years, this translated to living wage jobs. This means a job that pays an income that allows individuals or families to afford adequate shelter, food, and other life necessities. This cannot be a poverty wage that does not increase with the cost of living. OBS is equally focused on making sure the working conditions for workers are safe and healthy.

The country saw President Ronald Reagan bring the hammer down on PATCO, the air traffic controllers' union shortly after OBS' founding. This set the stage for blatant union-busting for years to come. Organizing workers and holding union activities was challenging in this hostile environment.

In a ten-year battle with giant multi-national General Motors (GM), Black workers reached into the community for support. The auto workers won their suit against GM around the time of OBS' founding. Some of these staunch fighters became founding members and were the backbone of the labor work. They led the opposition to layoffs, speedups, racist and sexist discrimination of women workers, as well as against plant closings.

The formation of the Concerned Auto Workers (CAW) in the early 80's was an effort to force the United Auto Workers (UAW) to be more accountable to their Black membership. The caucus sought to expose the U Ain't White behavior that caused racial divisions among Black and white workers. It fought for fair wages, safe working conditions, seniority rights and job security. OBS strategized with CAW members to win union offices and delegate positions to the UAW national conventions ,



The anniversary speakers often spoke to worker themes. John Taylor III was the anniversary keynote speaker in 2019. The SEIU union organizer from Georgia discussed the critical role of the union in the fight against racism, a defeatable obstacle to multi-racial worker solidarity.



OBS joined the Jobs Campaign of 1983. That same year, the organization helped to form the Missouri Black Labor Council as an umbrella for labor activists. The Council was short-lived due to the lack of resources for the infrastructure but the need for such a group was important to identify. OBS worked with many labor groups such as the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, Jobs with Justice and with unions which greatly facilitated the coordinated responses to worker issues that arose. One such struggle was the plantation-like conditions at Morgan Linen Company in 1984 where workers, mainly Black women, were forced to ask for permission to use the restroom. The successful negotiations with management resulted in better working conditions for laundry employees and gave them the respect they deserved from the company.



OBS and its "cousin", Black Workers for Justice, engaged in mutual support activities. OBS distributed "Justice Speaks," BWJF's newspaper covering workers' struggles in the Black Belt South. They traded keynote speakers for their respective anniversary events. The two women's units collaborated on projects and statements.

Other activities of OBS to advance worker solidarity was to assist the Black workers at the local Ford Assembly plant in developing "the Black Workers Dialogue". OBS also participated in the "Workers' Rights are Human Rights Public Hearing" and worked with other groups to defeat HB29 (anti-Affirmative Action legislation). OBS supported the I-70 highway shutdown for more construction jobs for African Americans.

OBS has always worked on the passage of minimum wage increases. It is in staunch opposition to union-busting and efforts to make Missouri a Right to Work state. It stood with organized labor each time the proposed legislature raised its ugly head. OBS helped to collect signatures for ballot initiatives, educate voters and get them to the polls. In 2018, Proposition A suffered a decisive defeat at the polls.



As an affiliate organization of the Black Radical Congress, OBS helped to build international support for the Charleston Five, members of the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) who were victimized by police during a righteous protest. The trumped up felony charges were eventually dropped.

During the anti-apartheid movement, OBS joined with others to support worker unions, like COSATU, in their liberation struggles against the South African regime. As globalization engulfs the world economy, no opportunity can be missed to coalesce with others for the unification of workers everywhere.



OBS hosted the international women's labor delegation when they came to St. Louis for the AFL-CIO State Convention in 2017. The women hailed from parts of Africa and the Global South, and gained new insights from exchanging their organizing experiences.





The AFL-CIO's LIFT program was a natural fit for OBS. The Labor Innovation Fund for the 21st Century encouraged partnerships between community groups and unions. AFL-CIO Executive VP Tefere Gabre and Neida Domínguez (LIFT) visited St. Louis in 2018 to support "Working from the Bottom," a joint project of OBS and Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 6355.

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Bill Fletcher, Jr., a respected labor organizer and union leader, spoke on the re-election of President Obama and the building of a new labor movement (2012). Fletcher also signed his book, *They're Bankrupting Us! And 20 Other Myths about Unions*. His visit was sponsored by a collaboration of labor, community and Left groups.



The historic Jefferson Bank protest lived on symbolically for over 60 years. The 1963 protest at the bank demanded jobs for Black people who were the bank's main clientele. It was a milestone in the St. Louis civil rights movement and Jeff Bank participants organized the annual event to honor it.

At a certain point, aging veterans turned the commemorative protest over to the next generation of freedom fighters. OBS accepted the baton, but understood it needed help to fill the big shoes of those before them. It called upon its partners, MO Jobs with Justice, SEIU, Coalition for Black Trade Unionists, Fight for \$15, and others fighting for workers' rights. Each year, a different worker issue and speakers recognized the victories won and to highlight struggles that needed support.

In 2024, Green asked that the commemoration cease and that the planning group look at other ways to uphold the goals and legacy of the Jefferson Bank protests. The main rationale was that the bank had been sold to First Mid Bank in 2021. It had changed the bank's name which would make the commemorative protest confusing to on-lookers.



OBS has supported the Fight for \$15 since its inception. In addition to mobilizing for the protests and rallies, OBS members walked employees back to work when they took off work to participate in activities which advocated for their rights as workers.



In 2021 came additional troops for workers' struggles. The Missouri Workers Center hit the ground organizing workers at Starbucks Coffee, Amazon and other low-wage sites across the state. MWC fights to end racism in the workplace. It fights for livable wages as well as safe and healthy work environments.

The Struggle Against Police Terror

The fight against police violence is one of OBS's pillars. We have continuously organized resistance to the armed occupation of police in the Black community. OBS educated and agitated that the primary role of police was to control and terrorize neighborhoods of color and working-class whites. On the other side, police work hard to protect the property of businesses and the rights of the wealthy. OBS has been a consistent voice in the struggle against police misconduct and abuse, especially since police are generally the first point of contact onto the assembly of the Prison Industrial Complex and the execution chambers.

Veteran activists with a history in this arena were founding members of OBS. They came from campaigns like CAP's Stop Killer Cops! and formations like People Fighting Repression (PFR). They brought with them their organizing skills. The young organization would be tested early in its infancy with the savage shooting of Mary Frances Beasley, a Black resident of Kinloch by

Berkeley killer cop Hackmeyer. Beasley, who had a history of mental health issues was shot seven times by Hackmeyer as she walked down a busy street on a cold day, clad in only a nightgown. She lived but suffered permanent paralysis in her arm.

OBS organized the outrage of the Kinloch community into a fighting unit. OBS conducted its own investigation of the police crime. Receiving overwhelming support from Kinloch residents including its Mayor, OBS was successful in achieving its main goals: getting Hackmeyer fired and ensuring a civil suit compensated Beasley for her injuries. The victory from the six-year struggle gained the group much respect for its thorough and persistent workstyle for justice.

After the Beasley victory, OBS took on numerous cases of police harassment, brutality and murder over the metro area, too many to detail here. The unprecedented campaign for Beasley and the Kinloch community proved that police were not invincible. This was a pivotal turn because victims and their families could use the OBS model without the organization having to lead the charge. All the efforts were unified in the demands for the sanctity of Black lives and for accountability of the police.

In 1983, St. Louis killer cop Joseph Ferrario killed Marilyn Banks as the young mother sat on her porch. Her death would

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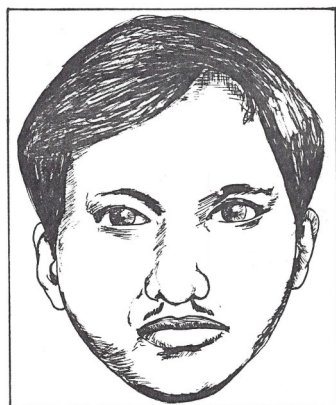
be a defining moment in the struggle for police accountability to solidify the true nature of the police and why local control was needed. Ferrario was actually trying to kill a Black juvenile that he was chasing through the residential neighborhood. OBS was instrumental in the formation of the Coalition Against Police Crimes & Repression that formed in the aftermath of the Banks tragedy. The Banks case had some historic firsts.



After her death, Marilyn Bank's sister posed with the surviving children. Harold was five years old and Baby Antwon was only eleven months old at the time of their mother's death.

It was the first proof that police carry "thrown-down guns" to justify their lethal responses. The gun Ferrario claimed was used by the juvenile to shoot at him had no ammunition clip. OBS had proclaimed for years that planting guns and contraband were common practices by the police. It was the first indictment ever of a white police officer for the murder of a Black person. CAPCR raised thousands for a trust fund for her sons. CAPCR raised thousands for a trust fund for Bank's sons. The half million-dollar settlement of the civil suit was the largest in Missouri's history at that time. Ferrario's trial was moved outside of St. Louis to ensure his acquittal of criminal charges. He did not escape the mounting demand by the community to be fired.

WANTED JOSEPH FERRARIO



For the Murder of Marilyn Banks &
the Attempted Murder of Laura Gregory
REWARD: JUSTICE
For Black & Working People

In 1988, CAPCR believe it had achieved most of its goals and agreed to disband. It needed to regroup and reenergize before tackling the ambitious goal of seizing control of the police department. OBS worked with groups like the NAACP, the ACLU and the National Alliance Against Racism and Political Repression to address the wave of police violence.

Police shootings of civilians were escalating both locally and nationally. OBS continued to educate the community on how to respond when stopped by police. Along with other groups and concerned citizens, police abuse and violence were met with organized protests and demands for justice. When cops were charged, the community was mobilized to pack the courtroom. An empowered community was making it difficult for rogue cops to hide behind the "blue wall of silence."



Photos: With no cell phones or the internet as reference, no one knew what Ferrario looked like. A Wanted poster was issued for the community to be on the lookout (BOLO) for the killer cop.

Rev. Garnett Hennings, an active minister at St. Paul AME Church, led angry protestors to the police department after the death of young Marilyn Banks. Her death was a turning point in the community's demand for more control of their police department and subsequently more accountability.

In 1997 Gregory Bell, a mentally retarded young man, was viciously attacked in his home by St. Louis cops. Bell's brothers speak out at a rally. Protests are an effective vehicle for the release of pain and anger, but ultimately they must be connected to a tangible demand that brings some relief for the community. As a part of the civil suit, J. Justin Meehan, attorney for the family, made putting police complaint forms in district stations for the community's easy access.



St. Louis joins the rest of the world in responding to the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis cops in 2020.



Community activist Zaki Baruti speaks at a 2012 rally in front of the Old Courthouse to protest of the police murder of Travon Martin.



MORE organizer Derek Laney leads chants at a protest of the SWAT killing of Isaiah Hammett in 2017.

Police Violence Escalates

The last thirty years have seen an increase in the militarization of urban police departments. Police in Black and Brown communities now look like an occupying force. With military training and military equipment, police encounters have deadly consequences. During the Ferguson Uprising, police used equipment on protesters dispersed from the Department of Defense 1033 program.

Since the end of the Justice for Marilyn Banks campaign, OBS had continued to support victims of police violence and their families through protest, direct action, media campaigns, and advocacy. Getting justice was elusive—even with strong street action. Police killings increased. It was time to unite the many to defeat the few.

OBS was often called to the scene when there was a police shooting or beat-down. It conducted crime reconstruction and talked to witnesses who often would not talk to police. The conclusions were never the same as the Internal Affairs Department's (IAD) quick response of justifiable homicide in nearly every case.

OBS also received calls for help from families whose loved ones were in police custody. The police often refused to give the location of the person, forcing families to call the various police stations for answers. The most anticipated fear was the vicious brutality one could expect while in custody. While it may not have reached the depravity of the torture chambers in Chicago's police department under Commander Jon Burge, there were forced false confessions and sadistic beatings even when no crime had been committed.

From interviews with "suspects," OBS documented inhumane interrogations tactics included having a loaded gun put in the mouth, being subjected to electroshocks, getting beat with telephone books or having a metal trashcan put over one's head, then having the can hit with metal rods. These tactics were used to conceal any visible signs of beating. However, there were times when suspects were released with obvious serious injuries from blows by billy clubs and flashlights, but the injuries were chalked up as a result from resisting arrest. Not only did victims have to endure hospitalization but they were faced with defending themselves against resisting arrest charges. OBS and other groups fought to get surveillance cameras in police interrogation rooms. This policy change, plus educating citizens on their Miranda rights, helped to reduce incidents of brutality while in police custody.



Gina Torres, mother of Isaiah Hammett and Toni Ball, mother of Carey Ball, Jr. share a moment together above. The two mothers had sons murdered by St. Louis cops. Protests were held at police HQ for the shooting of Carey Ball, Jr. The college student was allegedly shot 25 times by SLPD cops in 2013.

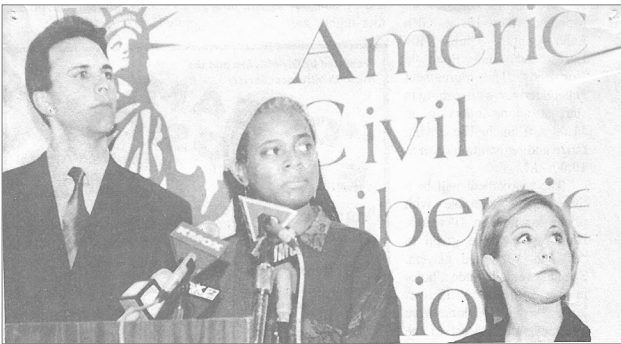
The Struggle for Police Accountability Intensifies

On October 22, 1998, OBS helped to organize the first National Day Against Police Brutality. The groups which came together agreed that one day of protest was insufficient, and CAPCR was revived.

Also in 1998, Senator Ashcroft barred the nomination of Judge Ronnie White to the federal bench. White was Missouri’s first Black state Supreme Court judge. When Ashcroft was nominated as U.S. Attorney General, fair-minded people in Missouri revolted, reminding the nation about Ashcroft’s racist block of Judge White. (In photo below, Fire Chief Sherman George and Ellen Reasonover join OBS and others in the 2001 protest of Ashcroft.)



Around this time, OBS and the ACLU received numerous complaints from victims of Driving While Black (DWB). The ACLU published a report in 1999 underscoring the national problem. The two groups were joined by Metropolitan Congregations United, Empower Missouri, CAPCR and MO-NAACP to pass legislation. Progressive Black and white lawmakers successfully pushed the bill through and Missouri became the fourth state in the country to make racial profiling illegal. The law required the State Attorney General to collect data from police jurisdictions in the state and publish an annual report. Then Missouri Attorney General Jay Nixon convened a task force to ensure the collection of data in the first year. OBS member Jamala Rogers was selected to serve on the task force. Every year since the law’s



Jamala Rogers, join ACLU leaders, Matt LeMieux and Denise Lieberman in a press conference on Driving While Black (2002).

inception, a report was issued that re-affirmed the racial disparities in vehicle stops by police. Every year, concerned groups called a press conference to disclose the persistent, troubling statistics. There was no interest in addressing genuine solutions to racial profiling by area police departments.

With the goal of achieving community control, greater transparency, and better police accountability, CAPCR began in 1999 to push for an effective Civilian Oversight Board. Alderman Terry Kennedy introduced the first bill in 2001. The bill for civilian oversight passed the Board of Aldermen (BoA) in 2007, but was vetoed by then Mayor Francis Slay. CAPCR continued its organizing for the next several years the COB was finally passed into law in 2015. After 150 years of State control, Missouri voters passed a ballot measure in 2012 that turned the police department back to the St. Louis citizens. Local control and the COB were two critical reforms that bought some relief for citizens concerned about a corrupt department which never faced accountability. This reform would be seized by the Republican-led legislature in 2025.

The intractable resistance by the SLMPD led coalition members to conclude that the police department was incapable of change. CAPCR made the conscious decision to join the abolitionist movement.



In 1998, St. Louis held its first National Day Against Police Brutality campaign. Its goals are to honor the ‘Stolen Lives’ taking by cops and to expose the system that condones and perpetrates the killing of citizens. Since then, CAPCR has held a variety of annual events on October 22 (O-22) from town halls to protests to teach-ins.



Literally every progressive sector was called into action in the struggle for local control, from unions to congregations. The Jobs with Justice Workers Rights Board held hearings that reached a broad audience on the need for citizens to control their police department.



CAPCR embarked on a *Re-envisioning Public Safety* campaign in 2017. Community input for getting to the roots of crime without more police helped to reshape the campaign into the Campaign for Real Public Safety: ReEnvision ~ ReInvest ~ ReBuild. The 3 Rs are a humane and effective way to look at public safety.



CAPCR turned up the heat in 2003 with an economic boycott, “No Justice, No Tourist\$, No Buck\$.” National gatherings coming into St. Louis were asked to reconsider their site choice. The boycott was successful in raising the issue of police corruption to a national level. There were times when civil disobedience was necessary. In photo above, JuJu Jacobs and Janey Archey were arrested for trespassing.



Then Mayor Frances Slay was forced to sign the Civilian Oversight Board into law (2015), after previously vetoing it (2007). It was inevitable that the majority of voters who passed the ballot initiative was only going to grow. Alder Terry Kennedy had the honor of witnessing the signing. Kennedy was instrumental in shaping the legislation over the years and rallying the alderpeople around the various versions.

Then MO State Reps Karla May, Jeanette Mott-Oxford and community leaders shared their concerns about the Attorney General’s dismal report on racial profiling at a press conference (2019). The statistics proved that Driving While Black was a problem then, and is still one in 2025.



After the historic law for the Civilian Oversight Board (COB) was passed, CAPCR was active in establishing the application process. The COB has gone through many changes and face several challenges. CAPCR remains a defender and protector of the beloved community reform. Because of its long history with the COB, CAPCR is a trusted resource for the intent and scope of the law that originally created the COB. It is uncertain what the future of the COB with the 2025 takeover of the SLPD by the State.



The family and supporters of Cortez Bufford gathered at City Hall in 2022 to celebrate what would have been his 27th birthday.

STOP SWAT

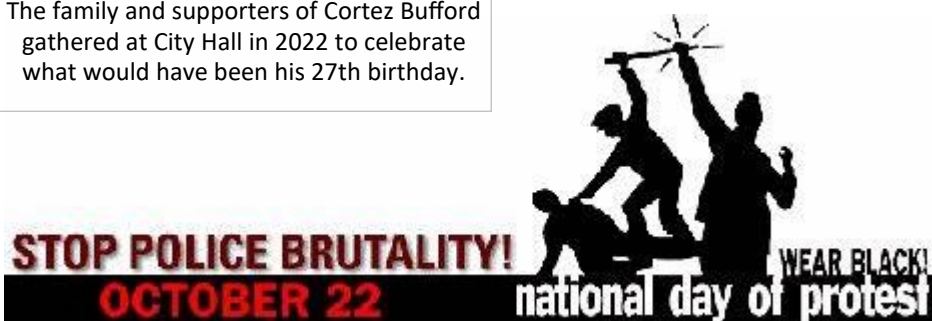
The Dangers of Militarized Police

Guest Speaker: Alex Vitale
Author of *"The End of Policing"*

Thurs. Dec 5, 6 - 8 PM
@ The Deaconess Center
1000 N. Vandeventer Ave

with an update from
Close The Workhouse

The Special Weapons and Tactical Team (SWAT) is trained and equipped to deal with “high-risk” situations like terrorist attacks and hostage situations. How did three of St. Louis’ innocent citizens get gunned down in their own homes by SWAT? The families of Isaiah Hammett, Don Clark, Sr., Sudanese immigrant Bade Ali Jabir and others have never received answers from the SLPD. They have not received justice. Based upon community outrage, Mayor Tishaura Jones signed an executive order banning city police from executing no-knock warrants in 2022.



OBS sees the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) as the over-arching system of the police, courts and prisons responding to crime. It also includes the technology and business interests that maintain and profit from incarceration. It makes its booming profits on the backs of mainly Black and Brown communities.

Before Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* was published in 2010, OBS had already borne witness to the burgeoning prison population in Missouri. There were only a handful of facilities and about 10,000 inmates when they started going into the prisons in the 1970s. In the next twenty years, the number ballooned to twenty-two, fueled by the crack epidemic. The following thirty years, there was a prison built every ten days in the U.S. to hold the nearly two million people in cages, disproportionately African Americans.

Missouri currently has 668 facilities, including detention centers, jails, state, and federal prisons that houses an estimated 41,000 humans. The state's incarceration rate is higher than most civilized countries. The recidivism rate is nearly 44% which speaks to the inside conditions and the lack of support on the outside, a guarantee return of inmates. There are approximately 60,000 citizens on parole and probation in the state.

OBS has a long history in exposing the racist brutality and dehumanization of the prison system. One of its founders had already been banned from Missouri State Penitentiary in the 1970's by Warden Donald Wyrick. At the insistence of late State Rep. Charles Troupe, the ban was lifted in the eighties by Roy Black, the Department of Corrections' first African American director. Rep. Troupe chaired the powerful DOC's



Fredrico Lowe Bey (right) is one of OBS' cases of wrongful convictions. He posed above with brothers caged at ERDCC.

Appropriations Committee and facilitated a number of reforms based on controlling the budget. Troupe also made it possible for OBS to conduct MSP tours with members of the public and talk with prisoners who were organizing inside the walls. Although the program was successful in exposing the inhumane conditions of the prison and getting some remedies, it had a traumatizing impact on the visitors. OBS phased out the program, but not its sharp agitation with prisoners and their families to expose Wyrick's naked brutality and arrogant disregard of human life, forcing him to resign in 1987.

OBS published "Behind these Walls" during the 80's, a publication that addressed prison issues and presented the perspectives of inmates and OBS. The commitment to publish a prisoner-centered newsletter was passed on to Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE). It published "The Turning Point" until the death of co-editor Edna "Hedy" Harden in 2022.

During COVID-19, prisoners were subjected to the disregard of the DOC for the Center for Disease Control's guidelines. Prison staff did not wear masks or comply with quarantine protocols. Realizing that families were going to be restricted from visits, OBS partnered with CURE to add \$10 to the phone accounts of some three hundred prisoners in our combined databases. Their gratitude and that of their families were humbling. It made the \$3.00 fee charged back to CURE and OBS tolerable.

After years of unsuccessfully trying to humanize the PIC, OBS is unapologetic abolitionist. It refrains from efforts to add resources to a bankrupt system intent on control, containment, and the sanctioned killing of Black and Brown people.

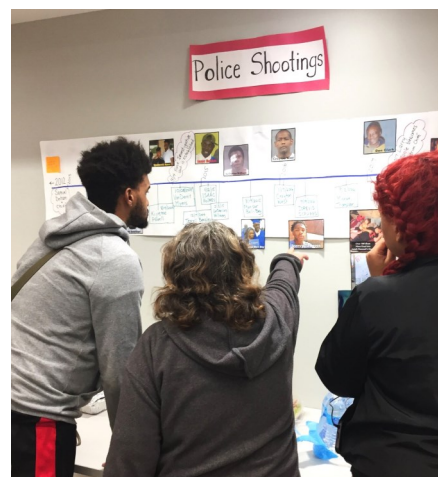


OBS responded to the complaints of detainees at the City Justice Center (CJC) that there were no law books in the library. OBS staff delivered boxes of law books to CJC employees (2017). The books were donated by the local ACLU, MacArthur Justice Center and Saint Louis University Law Clinic.

Attorney Will Snowden, founder of The Juror Project in New Orleans (left in photo), came to St. Louis to help OBS kick off its Black Jurors Matter Campaign in 2017. Both groups are committed to getting enthusiastic citizens into jury pools. OBS focused on Black defendants having a jury of their peers due to the number of Black jurors disproportionately struck from juries. COVID-19 sidelined the campaign, but it has been revamped.



OBS believes that people have civil and human rights as suspects, as jail detainees, as incarcerated humans and as returning citizens. OBS, EXPO and others protested the unsafe and unhealthy conditions at Dismas House in 2020. Dismas is one of the oldest halfway facilities in the country for federal prisoners in St. Louis.



Understanding the historic origins and purpose of the police helps to better understand the prison industrial complex. Police are the first point of contact in the corrupt, unjust system that connects the police with the jails, the courts, the prisons and the parole and probation façade. Accountability of law enforcement is crucial they are an extension of the military and have the authority to shoot or kill citizens. It is why CAPCR and OBS have both spent a lot of time and resources into community education of these systems.

Jail is Hell

The main difference between jails and prisons is that the people in jail have not been convicted and sentenced. They are awaiting trial for mainly non-violent offenses, such as ticket citations, and get stuck there because they cannot afford bail or bond. This means that innocent, poor people are caught in the nightmarish trap set up and maintained by the Prison Industrial Complex.

Opposition to the St. Louis Medium Security aka The Workhouse began from the time it was built in 1966. Initially the demands by detainees, their families and the community were about reforms. The jail brought in the poor, addicted, unhoused and mentally ill to a hellhole of rats, roaches, mold, bad food, intolerable internal temperatures, inadequate medical services, and the list goes on. The brutality of guards and the indifference of the prison administration and city officials worsened these conditions.

Over the years, detainees, their families and concerned groups filed lawsuit after lawsuit, with only temporary relief. Not only were the problems of the current jails not fixed, but cities moved to build more cages. In the middle of a National Moratorium on Prison Construction, legislators put a bond issue before Missouri voters in 1976 to get approval for a new jail in Kansas City.



The ACLU local chapter had already been in a 15-year legal battle with the Workhouse. In 2009, it unleashed a scathing report on the jails, exposing the filthy conditions and brutal practices of the guards. “Suffering in Silence: The Human Rights Abuses in St. Louis Correctional Centers.” When no definitive action was taken, the ACLU followed up with a second report in

2012, “Still Suffering in Silence: The Continued Human Rights Abuses in the St. Louis Corrections Centers.” John Chasoff and Redditt Hudson were the principal writers and investigators of the reports. Their relationships with groups like OBS and CAPCR strengthened their ability to get justice for the community.

OBS was not impressed with the opening of the City Justice Center in 2002. We warned that the new, state-of-the-art cages would only mask the toxic environment transferred from the Workhouse. The conditions and abuse led to lawsuits. The situation intensified with the deaths of eighteen detainees between 2020-2024 with no tangible action from



Detainees at the un-Justice Center rebelled against the horrific conditions in 2021, causing substantial damage. With no real changes in conditions, detainees took a guard hostage in 2023 and demanded pizza and chicken.



Mayor Tishaura Jones signed ordinance in 2022 to create the Division of Civilian Oversight after a collaborative effort between Board of Alder members and CAPCR. The office would house both citizen-led police and jail oversight boards.

Warden Jennifer Clemons-Abdullah. The newly formed DFOB was refused access to the building as mandated by law. Janis Mensah, a DFOB co-chair was severely beaten by guards when they attempted to get answers. Clemons-Abdullah’s lack of leadership prompted more lawsuits, more protests, and a call for her firing. She was finally fired in December 2024.

The #CloseTheWorkhouse Campaign emerged in 2018 to energize the fifty-year struggle for closure. A new generation of activists took the fight over the finish line with a unanimous vote of the Board of Alderpeople to shut it down. Mayor Jones closed the shameful relic shortly after taking office, fulfilling a controversial campaign promise. She convened a community engagement process to re-envision what would be done with the complex.

The uprisings at the CJC prompted renewed momentum around oversight of the jail, just as citizens had demanded a Civilian Oversight Board of the police. Alder Shameem Clark-Hubbard sponsored a bill that created the Division of Civilian Oversight to house both the Detention Facilities Oversight Board (DFOB) and the Civilian Oversight Board. Because of its history of drafting the COB language and the subsequent amendments to help strengthen the bill over the years, CAPCR was asked to assist in the process to ensure compliance with the spirit and principle of citizen oversight.

ArchCity Defenders’ “The Municipal Courts White Paper” set the tone for getting legal relief for Black residents targeted for citations in the municipalities outside St. Louis. ACD filed and won a historic settlement with the Jennings, MO police department. The \$4.7 million suit covered 2000 people held in the Jennings jail between 2010-2015. The plaintiffs were ordered to receive \$400 for each day they were confined. OBS was familiar with Jennings because of the numerous citizen complaints it had received for over the years against the department. When the class action members were not responding to the settlement administrator, ArchCity Defenders asked OBS to assist in following up with the former detainees to let them know the correspondence was legit and helped them to complete the paperwork. Although some received thousands of dollars from the lawsuit based on the length of their detention, nothing can compensate for lost jobs and the lost time with family combined with the trauma of isolation and the humiliation of being unjustly incarcerated.

Missouri's Exonerated

- Patricia Stallings (1991)
- Johnny Lee Wilson (1995)
- Steven Toney (1996)*
- George Revelle (1998)
- Ellen Reasonover (1999)*
- David Clay, Sr. (1999)
- Clarence Dexter (1999)
- James Strughold (1999)
- Armand Villasana (2000)
- Jon Keith Smith (2000)
- James Bowman (2001)
- Donald Dixon (2001)
- Eric Clemmons (2002)*
- Larry Johnson (2002)*
- Joseph Amrine (2003)*
- Lonnie Erby (2003)
- Jennifer Hall (2005)
- Theodore White (2005)
- Anthony Woods (2005)
- Antoine Bankhead (2006)
- Johnnie Briscoe (2006)*
- Antonio Beaver (2007)
- Darryl Burton (2008)*
- Josh Keezer (2009)
- Terry Antoine (2010)
- Zachary Lee Stewart (2010)
- Gary Engel (2010)
- Kenneth York (2010)
- Dale Helmig (2011)
- Richard Buchli II (2012)
- Codey Smith (2012)
- Reginald Griffin (2013)*
- George Allen, Jr. (2013)*
- Paula Hall (2013)
- Ryan Ferguson (2013)
- Robert Nelson (2013)
- Mark Woodworth (2014)
- Cornell McKay (2015)
- Russell Faria (2015)
- Ernest Leap (2016)
- Michael Amick (2016)
- Mike Wilkerson (2017)
- Lamont McIntyre (KS 2017)*
- Brad Jennings (2018)
- David Robinson (2018)
- Benjamin Faust (2018)
- Charles Jones III (2018)
- Rodney Lincoln
- Ricky Kidd (2019)*
- Donald Nash (2020)
- Jonathan Irons (2020)
- Lawrence Callanan (2020)
- Kevin Strickland (2021)*
- Keith Carnes (2022)
- Lamar Johnson (2023)*
- Lamont Campbell (2023)
- Sandra Hemme (2024)
- Chris Dunn (2024)*

*Cases OBS supported in some way.

Before Todd Shepherd admitted killing a University City cop in 2008, James “JB” Johnson was wrongfully accused, convicted, and imprisoned for killing a U City cop in 1970. The case garnered national attention and the legal services of renown defense attorney William Kunstler. Johnson, convicted by an all-white jury, had to endure many twists and turns in the case. The Committee to Free JB Johnson, which included future OBS members, was relentless in its efforts to mobilize the community and put pressure on an unyielding system. Eventually Johnson was freed, but only with the stipulation that he never return to St. Louis. It was counted as a People’s victory.

It is believed that one out of twenty criminal cases result in a wrongful conviction. The current system is only interest in locking people up under the guise of fighting crime. The main reason for wrongful convictions is prosecutorial misconduct—destroying or hiding evidence, intimidating witnesses or using unreliable informants. In Missouri, the State Attorney General is notorious for blocking court’s rulings to free those who have been proven innocent.

One of OBS’ first cases of wrongful conviction was that of Ellen Reasonover. OBS organized community support until the case was finally selected by Centurion Ministries (CM), the first national group to tackle wrongful convictions. Since its founding in 1983, CM has freed seventy innocent people who were serving life sentences or faced executions for crimes they did not commit. It would be the beginning of a long relationship of the two justice groups, bringing the legal expertise of (cont.)



Jamala Rogers posed with Reggie Griffin, Ellen Reasonover and Joe Amrine at a death penalty event (2017). OBS worked with them and their families for years to prove their innocence.



The Color of Change teamed up with OBS and others to collect the initial 25,000 signatures to put pressure on the court system to hear Lamar Johnson’s case (2019). When a date was set for Johnson’s exoneration hearing, another 25,000 was collected. Johnson was finally freed in 2022.

We Didn't Do It (cont.)

the New Jersey-based group together with the deep, community ties of BS. The 17-year-old struggle to exonerate Reasonover for a 1983 robbery and murder was one of sheer determination that propelled a successful defense campaign. Prosecutor Bob McCullough had asked for the death penalty. It was a grim reminder of how the courts can hold one’s life in the balance. Ellen’s freedom inspired others inside the prison walls to fight for their innocence despite the legal barriers of a corrupt and unjust system. OBS has also worked with the Midwest Innocent Project as well as individual private attorneys on cases of wrongful convictions in St. Louis, Missouri and around the country.



Members of Michigan’s Organization of Exonerees were welcomed by St. Louis to support the fight for Missouri’s wrongful convicted. Marvin Cotton, Jr. (left) and Kenneth Nixon (2nd from right) spent a combined 35 years for trumped up murder cases in Detroit that they didn’t do.

Circuit Attorney Gabe Gore has agreed to review the case of Fredrico Lowe Bey, a wrongful rape conviction that OBS and Centurion Ministries are working on. Lowe-Bey has been unjustly imprisoned for more than 36 years, longer than some murder sentences. In photo, Fredrico’s brother, Phillip Lowe, delivered a packet to Gore’s office from the legal team.



Actual innocence does not count in Missouri In a 2003 oral argument before the Missouri Supreme Court, Justice Laura Denvir Stith asked Assistant Attorney General Frank Jung, “Are you suggesting ... even if we find that Mr. [Joseph] Amrine is actually innocent, he should be executed?” “That is correct, your honor,” replied. Jung.

The Death Penalty and Executions

OBS has stood in tenacious opposition of the death penalty since its inception. It understood that race and class determines who gets executed. The practice is reminiscent of southern lynchings without the mob.

The U.S. Supreme Court struck down capital punishment in 1972, deeming it “cruel and unusual punishment,” but it was reinstated in 1976. The Eastern Missouri Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (later renamed Missourians to Abolish the Death Penalty) was founded in 1987. The coalition, including OBS as a member, took on the challenge to end the savage practice permanently in the state. More work will be needed to decrease the number of federal executions, but the states have seen important victories. Twenty-three states abolished the death penalty. Several others have moratoriums in place,

The most executions occurred under Governors Mel Carnahan, Eric Holden, and Jay Nixon—all Democrats. Despite the state’s steadfast love for executions, abolitionists in Missouri have made significant inroads in raising public awareness and chipping away at the merciless practice in Missouri. A 1986 class-action lawsuit supported by death penalty opponents dismantled the segregated housing unit (death row) and death-sentenced prisoners were integrated into general population at Potosi Correctional Center in 1989. In 2001, the execution of the mentally and intellectually disabled was banned. In 2005, the execution of juveniles under the age of 17 years old at the time of their crime was ruled unconstitutional. A state bill to give the death penalty to anyone who killed a law enforcement officer was defeated in 2017.

Abolitionists also went after the cocktail of drugs used for lethal injection. The European Union was outraged when it found out the U.S. was using propofol, a drug mainly manufactured in Europe for surgeries. The staunchly anti-death penalty UE threatened to ban all U.S. orders for the drug. Missouri scrambled for a replacement drug.

Another critical factor in the reduction of executions was getting the commitment of prosecutors to use the option of life without parole in the capital murders cases eligible for the death penalty. St. Louis and St. Louis County prosecutors Jennifer Joyce, Kim Gardner and Wesley Bell agreed to not impose the death penalty. Of the eight men remaining under a death order, three have been ruled mentally incompetent and the other five have pending appeals. Only 30 years ago, Missouri’s hitlist peaked at 100 people facing execution. This is a testament to the remarkable work by abolitionists in the state and around the country.



The Last Remnant of State Sanctioned Lynchings



Jamala Rogers talks to David Kaczynsky, who headed up the New Yorkers Against the Death Penalty in 2001. Kaczynski became active with the death penalty movement after his brother was subject to a death sentence for his series of violent crimes. His brother was Ted Kaczynski, the infamous Una Bomber. The FBI reneged on a promise to the family to seek mental health services instead of a prison sentence.

Jamala Rogers was the first African American chair of the Eastern Missouri Coalition Against the Death Penalty. Black membership grew and the organizing was connected to other community issues like police accountability. OBS helped to anchored the annual convention of the National Coalition Against the Death Penalty (NCADP) when it came to St. Louis. Death penalty opponent and actor Danny Glover was the keynote. OBS partnered with the American Friends Service Committee on a death penalty listening project to solicit views about the practice. The findings were presented at a public forum in 2008.



There have been people executed despite compelling evidence of their innocence such as Troy Davis, Cameon Willingham, Ruben Canto, Carlos Luna and others. In Missouri, victims of the system like Larry Griffin and Marcellus “Khalifah” Williams never got the chance to prove their innocence before they were executed. Ellen Reasonover was just one juror vote away from a death sentence.



OBS is equally committed to justice for all the political prisoners whose harsh sentences for their righteous activities or trumped up charges were equivalent to death sentences. Mumia Abu, Assata Shakur, Mutulu Shakur, Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin (aka H. Rap Brown) and many others who were victims of COINTELPRO still languish in U.S. prisons. Leonard Peltier was pardoned by President Biden after spending almost a half century behind bars. Soffiyah Elijah (in center of left top photo) was one of the attorneys for the successful release of the San Francisco 8. Elijah was the keynote speaker at the 27th OBS anniversary celebration.



OBS has participated in the vigils organized by MADP scheduled on the day of executions in protest of state murders. The vigil in the photo was held in front of the downtown municipal courts building to protest the 2024 execution of Marcellus Khalifah Williams, in spite of compelling evidence of his innocence.

Ferguson Yesterday...the Fire Next Time

OBS was on the streets of Ferguson within hours of the murder of Mike Brown, Jr. by Ferguson cop Darren Seals. The organization would play multiple roles over the following weeks, not knowing when the end of the resistance would come. The embers of racial injustice had been simmering for years as Jamala Rogers would uncover in her book, *Ferguson is American: Roots of Rebellion*. Mike's murder and the events that followed made an indelible mark on the St. Louis region.

OBS had been an all-volunteer organization in 2014 and did not have the capacity to respond to the gravity of the Ferguson Uprising. We put out a national call to our friends and allies to send us money for a paid organizer. The response was overwhelming. We also received an incredible volume of unsolicited medical and protest supplies. These helped to sustain the ability to hold down West Florissant street activities and to take care of the thousands of protestors converging on Ferguson, MO. OBS became the go-to organization for information, comfort, mentoring, strategy, networking, and media requests. OBS had never experienced anything of this magnitude, and the intensity of support from around the world was humbling. Sometimes people included personal notes of concern and well-wishes with their packages.

OBS members rose to the occasion, and quickly made themselves available when and where they could. On the streets of Ferguson, they were protestors, security, medics and observers. Behind the scenes, OBS members were a part of the small army of volunteers who helped to build and maintain the infrastructure that made the Ferguson Uprising the longest protest in modern history.

The mandates for transformation rising from the ashes of Ferguson are not just the responsibility of the Forward Through Ferguson organization, but all forward-thinking people in the region.



The Greater St. Mark's Family Church, the Rowan Community Center and the Service Employees International Union were facilities made available 24/7 during the Ferguson Uprising. Above, veteran civil rights activist Percy Green conducts a training on civil disobedience at the Rowan Center.

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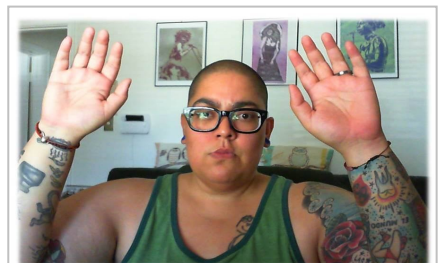
OBS teamed up with the Color of Change, the nation's largest online racial justice organization, and collected nearly one million signatures to demand justice for Mike Brown and the end to police violence. The petitions were delivered to President Obama after a press conference at the White



The Artist Collective and other artists (below) played a critical role in amplifying messages through powerful visuals. The Mirrored Casket was a popular prop as it reflected images of the happenings around it. Its permanent home became the National Museum of African American History & Culture.



The grandmother of a Ferguson protestor sent OBS this X-ray of a rubber bullet in her granddaughter's skull. She did not want to publicize the name of the hospital where the granddaughter was treated because the elder feared retaliation for her family. Instead she wanted a trusted organization to know the situation in case anything suspicious happened. The bullet was removed, and the young protestor eventually recovered from the assault but not from the trauma that came with the bullet.



**#HandsUpFriday #Ferguson
#BlackLivesMatter
#IceBucketHack**

One of the spontaneous fundraisers during the early days of the Ferguson Uprising was the #IceBucketHack, creatively modified to raise money for OBS. From the West Coast, organizer Felicia Perez continued passing the spark on social media. Like with the murder of George Floyd, a ton of money poured into the region. Some of it was supportive and some of it was designed to co-opt the movement. #Cutthecheck was a reminder of how divisive money can be when there's no unified vision or shared values in our movement.





In the weeks following the murder of Mike Brown, Jr., numerous meetings, panels and teach-ins were held all over the region to make sense of the murder and how the community should be responding. Above is one such gathering at St. John AME Church, pastored then by Rev. Starsky Wilson (2014).



Left photo. Community, Labor, Faith and Youth sectors came together to form the Don't Shoot Coalition. The coalition provided the overall leadership to the Ferguson Uprising, including influencing local and state legislation.

Right photo. The Don't Shoot Coalition urged those who wanted to come to Ferguson to hold off until the Ferguson October weekend so that it could get a handle on the chaotic and volatile situation. The weekend brought thousands to St. Louis for rallies, protests, workshops and strategy sessions.



Above, Bukky Gbadegesin and Jonathan Fenderson facilitated a workshop at the SEIU complex. They were among several university professors who immersed themselves in the Ferguson activities. Educators and youth program advocates often chaperoned their students to participate in the historic events. There were many teachable moments for young people to understand how to become change agents in the unjust world around them.

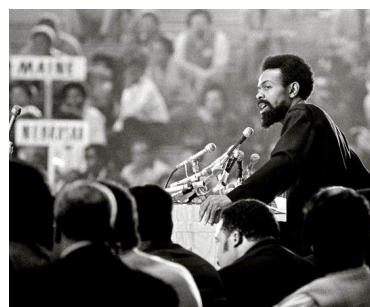
Below photo. Jeff Roorda, the vitriolic spokesperson for the police union, incites a riot at the public hearing for the civilian oversight board in 2015. He constantly flashed his arm bracelet "I am Darren Wilson" to get reaction from the packed room. His divisive actions were another example of the racist nature of the police union who occupy Black neighborhoods. Roorda's attempt to run for public office were unsuccessful and ultimately, he was replaced as the union spokesperson.



Local artist and filmmaker Damon Davis joined forces with Sabaah Fodayanto create *Whose Streets*, a look into the lives of Ferguson Uprising activists. OBS premiered a sold out local screening in 2015. There were also other documentaries which focused on the Uprising.

Future OBS members who were also part of the Congress of African People (CAP) received intense training and political education on the importance of a Black political agenda and how to run effective campaigns to implement that agenda. It was the organizing efforts of CAP that gave Newark its first Black mayor in 1970. CAP cadre were encouraged to travel to other cities to support Black candidates and hone their skills in the electoral arena. This practice was integrated into the OBS strategy for Black political power. Its members actively participated in campaigns such as Detroit's Coleman Young, Chicago's Harold Washington, Newark's Ras Baraka, and Chokwe and Antar Lumumba in Jackson, MS.

CAP cadre played a critical role in mobilizing for the historic National Black Political Convention in 1972. The Gary IN conference convened 10,000 delegates to ratify a Black political agenda. The energy and political mandate unleashed a wave of Black candidates to run for various offices. CAP cadre were the organizing backbone that set up local and state assemblies that debated the draft agenda before the convention and then guided the implementation afterwards.



In commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Gary gathering, OBS partnered with the Congress of African People Legacy Project for a webinar to highlight the political impact of the Gary agenda and how to build upon its accomplishments for an updated agenda.



At least since the National Negro Congress in 1935, the need for a Black agenda has been evident if our liberation movement is to have focus and direction as well as shared values and purpose. The Black Panther Party had their 10 Point Program. OBS uses the BRC Freedom Agenda as its platform and the Nguzo Saba as its Black Value System. It is critical to have a unifying fiber that binds people together in their political homes; it also provides a public-facing framework and objective criteria for holding people and institutions accountable. It is especially necessary when endorsing candidates and ballot issues to eliminate the subjective aspects and hold them to a tangible agenda.

Despite a growing cynicism about U.S. politics by Black people, the electoral arena is a place where we have historically struggled for reforms. The right to vote was won through the blood, sweat and tears of our people. OBS does not believe that the Black community can vote its way out of racial capitalism. Elections are not the destination; they are part of the organizing journey to educate our people about the limitations of bourgeois democracy. Every election shows our people who are our friends and who are our enemies. Through collective work and strategic organizing, the people can win meaningful victories.

Every day elected officials and the courts make decisions on our behalf, and we stay in the loop. OBS has supported or ran numerous candidates on the local, state, and national levels who supported a Black agenda for the working-class power. The same framework is used for supporting ballot initiatives. The corruption in politics makes it difficult to attract candidates committed to the interests of the working class, and not their own. Ongoing efforts to educate and organize the entire electorate are important in the fight for a genuine democracy.

The Rowan Community Center has been a spectator to the decline of the surrounding working-class neighborhood in the 22nd ward. The westside center has always been a hive for activities for the community and a space for movement organizing. The RCC remains a respected beacon of hope in the neighborhood because of its longevity and the positive happenings in and around the building.

OBS was ecstatic to support the election of the city's first independent alderman, Kenneth Jones. Jones was a member of the Community Party, USA, and a union worker. His nearly 20-year tenure started off with great fanfare but over time, Jones lost his radical bearings, and the 22nd ward suffered.

Residents looked to OBS for a replacement but the pickings were slim for suitable candidates. When Jones chose not to run again in 2002, OBS look for a candidate as well as a different ward model, one that built leaders who could organize the ward block by block. By methodically building a base in the 22nd Ward, the ward organization could become an influential force in city politics, especially at the Board of Alderpeople. Jones selected a political comrade to run for his seat against the objections of voters who saw James Ozier as a continuation of the Jones candidacy. Jeffery Boyd, an unknown resident and a community development instructor, threw his hat into the race. OBS knew Boyd could not win without its backing and stepped in to manage his campaign.



Then State Rep. Hope Whitehead stopped by the campaign HQ to show her support for Tumaini Neal, an OBS member who became the 22nd Ward committeewoman (2008). Volunteers prepared for a fundraiser at the home of Mr. Donnie Paige, a long time ward resident and OBS supporter.

With one big piece of the plan in place to build a grassroots ward organization, OBS looked to running candidates for committee people so that there was unified leadership at the ward level. It successfully ran Nora Tumaini Neal for committeewoman in 2008, and a second piece was in place. It was not long before Boyd broke away from the newly formed ward organization and endorsed Mayor Francis Slay, exerting his twisted view of an elected official's autonomy. The fledgling ward organization soon fell apart. It exposed a major weakness in understanding the political system. More education and motivation were needed to show residents they had power to make the ward a better place for their families. OBS recommitted itself to the long-term goals of stabilizing the ward, developing working class leaders, and building power.

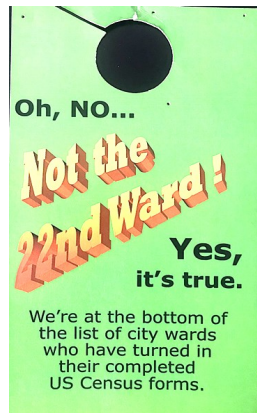
For his betrayal of the residents, OBS was given a mandate to stop Boyd's arrogant ambitions for higher office. He had proven that he was unworthy of holding any public office. Most people did not know just how corrupt Boyd was until he was indicted on federal charges in 2022 and sent to prison.

Renew 22

Citizen Survey


Despite the lack of leadership by 22nd Ward alders, OBS continued its organizing work in the 22nd Ward. The Rowan Community Center remained the hub for its basebuilding. All its social activities, educational forums and campaigns put the ward at the center of its efforts. Canvassing and surveys helped to know the residents better, not just the voting population. In 2022, Census redistricting and a local ordinance reduced the wards from 28 to 14. Ward 22 was combined with Ward 27 to create Ward 13.

The results of long time basebuilding in the ward mirror the views of the ward are generally in sync with those of OBS. The Voter Guides are examples of this reflection. They also show where more education and agitation need to be done. The sample ballot to the right shows the candidate and the proposition with the ward’s votes in red. With the trust in the self-less leadership of OBS, the organization can reasonably predict the ward’s political leanings, unlike the alderpeople. This is one of the key ways the group measures its political influence.



OBS would occasionally give feedback and encouragement to the ward about certain tendencies. In 2010, the dismal return of the Census forms prompted OBS to canvass the Ward 22 to educate residents about the importance of completing the forms, resulting in a big bump in Census returns.

The ward’s low voter turnout reflects its disillusionment with the electoral process and political leaders. Turnout reached an all-time low for the 2021 Primary. Only 792 of the 5713 registered voters showed up at the polls, the lowest voter turnout in the entire city. OBS immediately sent out a mailer with suggestions to boost the numbers in the General Election. An increased 20% of the voters came out and voted the OBS ballot.

	
Organization for Black Struggle	
22nd Ward Voter Ballot	
April 6, 2021	
General Election Results	
Tishaura O. Jones (85%) MAYOR	
Darlene Green (99%) COMPTROLLER	
Yes on Prop E (68%)	

The ward statistics are not rosy. A victim of Team Four’s destabilization plan, the ward and other parts of north St. Lous were obviously tagged for ‘benign neglect.’ Ward 22 has lost more residents than other wards. It has more abandoned buildings and vacant lots than most wards. Poverty and crime are pervasive. For the residents and particularly homeowners who have chosen to stay, there exist a spirit of defiant pride. OBS tapped into that spirit when it launched the Renew 22 Campaign in the early summer of 2014. The Ferguson Uprising only temporarily consumed OBS’ attention, and the campaign slogan lives on in the ongoing work of the organization.



Re-Elect Tishaura Jones for City Treasurer. VOTE August 4, 2020.

Above is OBS’ campaign literature for Tishaura Jones’s re-election as Treasurer. Jeffrey Boyd ran unsuccessfully for two city-wide offices—for Mayor and for Treasurer. OBS was determined to halt any traction of Boyd’s ambition for higher office so that his negligence was contained. He lost miserably in the 2017 mayoral race with only 3% of the overall city votes. In the 2020 Treasurer’s race, Boyd barely scraped up 500 votes in his home ward.



OBS and neighborhood partners provided safety family fun over the years like the street festival in top photo, all with no incidents of violence. In 2021, it joined the National Night for Safety & Liberation initiated by the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights in San Francisco. The event principles were consistent with OBS’s views regarding public safety without police and prisons. Instead, the focus is on building equity, power, and opportunity in communities rather than promoting fear, crime, and punishment. The community gets a safe space to re-imagine public safety like have access to affordable healthcare, living wages, decent housing, and a quality education. The Black Rep Theater performs a skit on voter rights at the CommUnity Hope & Wellness Day. #safetyis

There is an African proverb that says, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” OBS strongly believes in that sage wisdom because that is its lived organizing experiences. Building coalitions and united fronts are indispensable tools in the fight against racial and gendered capitalism. The major victories of the past 45 years bear out the fact that they would not have been possible without the broadest unity possible. The diverse organizations and individuals within the Black community and progressive movements can have a decisive impact when they work towards a common goal.

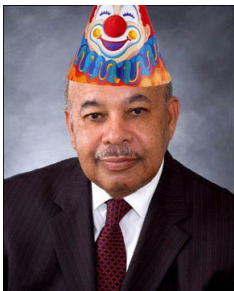
OBS been a part of so many coalitions and united fronts, they are too numerous to list here. It is proud to have been founding members of many of those formations. The coalitions that were not covered in the previous pages are highlighted here based upon their longevity, their impact, or their success in uniting the many to defeat the few.

The WeCAN Coalition

(Working to Empower Community Action Now)

A most innovative strategy was used in 2008 to send Ward CONnerly packing. The name of tis civil rights ballot initiative and the language were so misleading that the WeCAN coalition could not chance it getting on the ballot and tricking people into ending affirmation action in MO. The strategy was to stop people from signing the petition before it could get it on the ballot. There was a sophisticated network set up to report sightings of his paid canvassers and to educate the canvassers and those signing about the real con game going down. CONnerly’s MO Civil Rights Initiative failed to collect the needed signatures to qualify for the ballot. He left the state with this tail tucked, defeated and disgraced.

OBS created this piece of literature to be a bold attention-getter. Ward **CON**nerly was made a clown and the CON is his name was always emphasized. With organized opposition, his con game did not work in the Show-Me State. The con man was sent packing in humiliation.



Progressives United

Left and progressive groups came together in 1984 to defeat Mayor Vince Schoemehl. PU’s goals were to provide political leadership to the election of Freeman Bosley, Sr. as mayor and Alphonso Jackson as comptroller. It was part of the ongoing commitment to self-determination and the fight for Black political power. The campaigns were unsuccessful. PU dissolved when it was unable to agree on a collective focus beyond its slogan, *Come Alive in ‘85*.

The St. Louis County Regional Coalition

The national movement to elect reform prosecutors hit St. Louis in the post-Ferguson period. Wesley Bell was elected in 2018 to become the first African American St. Louis county prosecutor. The St. Louis County Reform Coalition help to push Bell’s candidacy over the finish line. It pushed for more transparency, a convictions integrity unit and the end to cash bail. The Color of Change and CRC organized a town hall on Bell’s scorecard for his first 100 days in office #100DaysOfJustice.



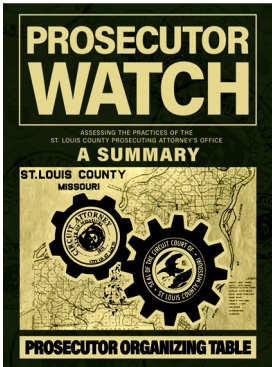
The Saturday legal clinic was an OBS partnership with Mound City Bar Association that started in 2004. Attorneys Jerryl Christmas and Donnell Smith coordinated the volunteer services of MCBA attorneys for over a decade. The attorneys gave legal advice from criminal charges to family matters to civil cases.

Privacy Watch STL

Privacy Watch STL is dedicated to confronting the issue of unnecessary surveillance in the city. It is a watchdog for exposing new and expanded surveillance technologies that are touted for making the city safer. Community Control Over Police Surveillance (CCOPS) was a big legislative victory that brings some measure of regulation, transparency and accountability to the rogue manner in which millions of dollars of spyware is being mashed on the citizens of St. Louis.



Prosecutor Organizing Table



Wesley Bell never delivered on his promise to the community that he would indict Ferguson cop Darren Wilson for the murder of Mike Brown, Jr. The Prosecutor Organizing Table issued its Watch Report in 2024. It focused on five areas of concern, along with suggestions to improve the prosecutor’s office.

Bell won the congressional race against Cori Bush in 2024 with the support of massive amounts of Zionist monies.

Community Justice Coalition

St. Louis voters elected Kimberly Gardner in 2016 to become the City’s first Black prosecutor. The Community Justice Coalition quickly formed to ensure that the reform agenda was implemented. Despite attacks by racist conservatives, Gardner maintained support of the voters and especially the Black community. She was re-elected in 2020. The attacks intensified amid several legal and personal missteps by Gardner’s office. She resigned in 2023.

Ask the Attorney Free Clinic



Justice for Reggie Clemons Coalition The Great Betrayal

OBS's organizing work took the case of Reginald Clemons to international heights. Because of our successful work around wrongful convictions, we were asked by his New York-based attorneys to head up Reggie's local defense work. OBS agreed to work with them and the family to prove his innocent claims. Reggie was part of four defendants charged with the 1991 rape and murder of Julie and Robin Kerry in the infamous Chain of Rocks murder case. For over 25 years, he claimed to be innocent of all charges and that a confession was beaten out of him by St. Louis police.

From 2005 to 2017, OBS engaged tens of thousands of supporters of various races, faith, gender and nationalities from all over the country and Europe. Facing a death sentence in 2009, an appeals court granted an indefinite stay of execution. The Missouri Supreme Court threw out Clemons's conviction in 2015, paving the way for a new trial. In the 2017 court hearing, the disheartening charade came to a shocking end when Clemons pleaded guilty to two counts of second-degree murder, two counts of rape and one count of first degree robbery. Reggie received five consecutive life sentences.

OBS found out the same way everyone else did—through the media. This was first time that OBS had been lied to so consistently by a person claiming innocence in a case. We were devastated because of the energy and resources that had been put into Reggie's case could have been used for a truly wrongfully convicted person. We sincerely apologized to a loyal community who had followed our leadership based upon our reputation. We are thankful that Reggie apologized to the Kerry family, and we hope he did so with his own devoted family. He has yet to apologize to OBS so that we can help a concerned community get meaning of the "why." The value of restorative justice is only meaningful when the person who has harmed takes responsibility for their actions and takes on repairing the harm done. We hope that he gathers up the courage to face our community with humility and remorse before he leaves this earth.

Jamala Rogers, Former Coordinator
Justice for Reggie Campaign

National Black Workers Center



**National Black
Worker Center**

OBS affiliated with the National Black Workers Center to support the contributions and struggles of Black workers and to amplify our collective voices. OBS supports the NBWC Black Worker Bill of Rights. In

2016, it launched the Black Labor Day social media storm and other activities. Each year, worker centers and other worker groups come together to organize around themes like #ThankBlackWorkers and #ShowMeTheMoney.

Labor Innovations for the Twenty-first Century (LIFT)

OBS and the Communication Workers of America Local 6355, in partnership with the Working While Black Campaign, joined forces to educate and to empower state workers. The groups had a shared value of the power of union membership. In Missouri, the union is obligated to represent employees whether they are union members or not. This makes building solidarity difficult and is a drain on union resources.

The goals were to recruit new members and to increase the collection of bank drafts. The other goal was to collect video stories of workers struggling to make ends meet based upon being ranked 50th of the lowest paid state workers in the country. The campaign helped to fortify CWA and its bargaining unit, which made members better prepared to confront the current attacks on government workers by the Trump administration.



OBS and CWA Local 6355 finalized details for a meet and greet at Legacy (St. Louis) for union members to socialize with one another and to learn more about CWA. A second event was held in Kansas City, MO. (2018)

Coalition Against Police Crimes & Repression



OBS was a founding member of CAPCR in 1983 and continues to provide leadership. In 2023, CAPCR celebrated its 40th anniversary with a proclamation from the City of St. Louis, sponsored by Alderwoman Shameem Clark-Hubbard.

CAPCR's greatest achievements were bringing local control of the police department back to St. Louis and the establishment of an independent civilian oversight board. The work has intensified with the Missouri state legislature seized control of the police department in 2025.

Missourians for Choice



The pro-choice movement in Missouri got a boost in 1990 with the launch of Missourians for Choice. Jamala Rogers was the sole African American on its board of directors, helping to broaden the narrative on reproductive rights. The PAC's main objectives were to identify pro-choice voters and volunteers to support pro-choice candidates. MFC also worked closely with Missouri Alliance for Choice, a coalition of 40 statewide organizations, to ensure women had access to safe and legal abortions. For over a decade, MFC grew its pro-choice voter database into a powerful asset for pro-choice candidates who supported women's right to choose. Its efforts resulted in Mel Carnahan becoming Missouri's first pro-choice governor.



MOVE: Win. Build. Transform

Missouri Organizing and Voter Engagement Collaborative (MOVE) and MOVE Action are statewide formations committed to multi-racial unity and to building political power. Since 2015, MOVE has taken a serious approach to voter engagement that compels political and social transformation. The statewide hub of organizations share a history of deep, community-based organizing in diverse geographies and constituencies across the state. Through coordinated campaigns over several cycles, member organizations have collectively touched millions of voters and moved them to support ballot initiatives in the best interests of Missouri families. This approach resulted in key wins of ballot initiatives such as Medicaid Expansion, the increase of the state minimum wage, as well as the defeat of Right to Work.

Through its MOVE membership, OBS amplified its voice for Black working families and deepened its understanding of rural conditions in order to find common ground. MOVE took the concept of statewide organizing to new heights using policy advocacy, political campaigning and data analysis to provide the backbone for integrated voter engagement.

Demos

Dēmos is a national public policy organization working to build a just, inclusive, multiracial democracy and economy, forging strategic alliances with grassroots and state-based organizations. OBS has been part of its cohort since 2015 to build power with and for Black and brown communities. Demos has provided trainings and space for cohort members to engage with one another on organizing strategies and tactics. In the face of growing threats of white supremacy and authoritarianism, it launched the Demos Power Agenda: A Framework for Building People Power. The Power Agenda reaffirmed the commitment to fighting for structural reforms that build economic, political and civic power for all people. OBS has benefited immensely from its participation in the cohort and with interactions with Demos staff.

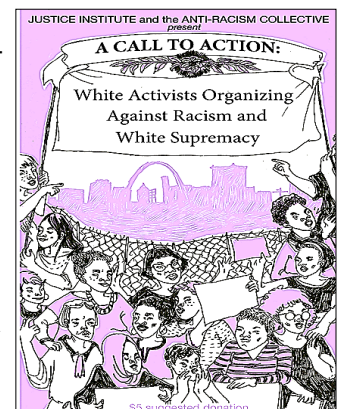
The Justice Institute

The Justice Institute came out of The Call to Develop an Organizing Institute in 2006. It formed in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina destruction which exposed the inability of the progressive movement to organize the people. Under the leadership of OBS and the Freedom Road Socialist Organization, JI brought together a multiracial core committed to the Guiding Principles.



The JI mission was to build a network of organizers, workers, teachers and students to motivate and to empower grassroots activists through political education and training. The vision of the Institute is to ensure economic, political and social justice for working class people through local organized struggles.

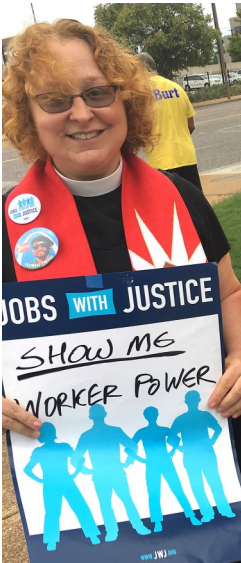
The main way the group saw actualizing its mission was through principled political discussion and coordinated action using methodologies from Ella Baker, Paulo Freire and other popular education models. It used various ways of understanding global capitalism from readings to its Freedom Friday Film series. It took on study of all the isms such as racism, sexism, classism and heterosexism and challenged both individual and organizational relationships. JI organized to assess President Obama's first 100 days and the St. Louis delegation to the US Social Forum in Detroit (2010).



In 2003, one of those readings inspired the formation of the Anti-Racist Collective (ARC) within JI. *The Cost of Privilege* by Chip Smith highlighted the need for a different kind of anti-racist ally. The book also highlighted areas for more discussion and transformative work. ARC published *A Call to Action: White Activities organizing Against Racism and White Supremacy*. The Call established the mandates to be accountable to people of color and to work on self-transformation in a community building mutual trust and support.

JI summed up its work before formally ending the group in 2018. ARC was re-organized as the Anti-Racist Organization Collective (AROC).

Missouri Jobs with Justice



OBS was a founding member of Jobs with Justice in 1999, sharing a vision and mission that puts workers and their families at the center. The St. Louis JwJ grew to include presence in Kansas City, Springfield-Ozarks, St. Charles, and Mid-Missouri. The statewide coalition of unions, community groups, faith leaders and others leaders work to build power through action and strong relationships that are rooted in justice, equity, and solidarity. Member organizations pledge how up at least five times for others’ fight for worker power. OBS and MO JwJ are also co-conspirators around issues such as protecting and de-criminalizing our right to freedom of assembly, protest, and speech. The two groups have convened the Right to Assemble table for the last five years and have been able to beat back or weaken the draconian legislation.



STL is Not for Sale coalesced in 2020 to oppose the privatization of the St. Louis airport. The scheme was the brainchild of billionaire Rex Sinquefeld to strip our city of public assets and sell them off to corporations. The Lambert Airport is prime real estate and generates millions of dollars in revenue for the city. The bill was crushed.

Black Radical Congress



OBS was a founding member of the BRC and at one point was the site of the national office when Jamala Rogers served as the national organizer. OBS was the host committee for the 2008 national conference. The BRC operated from 1998-2008 but its powerful Freedom Agenda lives on. There is also a summation by Jamala and Bill Fletcher, “Sixteen Lessons in Building the BRC.”



National Black United Front

OBS is a founding member of the National Black United Front, its active participation spanned nearly 15 years. The St. Louis chapter hosted the 7th and 12th NBUF Conventions. The chapters were active in the Free South Africa and New Jewel Movements. They fought against white racist terror, including police terror, advocated freedom for political prisoners worked for reparations (NDABA unification); and pushed to stop gentrification. NBUF organized around African-centered education, electoral representation, collective economic power and institution building. NBUF is still active in the fight for the liberation of our people. OBS has maintained a relationship with BUF chapters and members over the years.

Photo: The Central Committee posed at the 2nd NBUF Convention. The NBUF CC was made up of a rep from each chapter. NBUF’s first chair was Rev. Herbert Daughtery (center, 1st row).



United to Respect and Protect Mother Earth

Although environmental justice was not one of its pillars, OBS is certainly concerned about how corporate greed is destroying the vital resources of the planet. It has been part of several coalitions and projects to stop the poisoning of our communities. There were protests at Monsanto World Headquarters for its genetically modified seeds and global chemical contamination. In 2003, OBS help to organize the 7th International Gathering on BioDevastation in St. Louis. The Dump Veolia coalition successfully beat back the lucrative contract to take over the city’s water supply in 2013. Veolia is a multinational bloodsucker with ties to Israel. It got a sweetheart deal in Michigan which led to the water crisis in Flint. OBS was a delegate to the 1991 First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit held in Washington, D.C. The summit was a game-changer for the predominantly white environmental movement. It was organized by Damu Smith, a St. Louis native who had taken his organizing skills to D.C. OBS also worked in alliances to support the fight of the Ogoni people in Nigeria against the plundering of their resources by Shell Oil Company. It stands in community with those protecting the earth whether shutting down the Stericycle medical waste incinerator in North St. Louis or protesting the destruction of coral species in the Deepwater Horizon oil spill of 2010.



St. Louis was once the home of five coal companies who became the target of citizen groups demanding an end to fossil fuel and making investment in renewable energy and sustainability initiatives. OBS joined the Take Back STL initiative to collect signatures for a ballot initiative to limit tax credits to the companies. Mayor Slay and Gov. Nixon conspired to shut down the process by passing a state bill blocking it. Photo below, OBS supported student demands of Washington University students to divest from Peabody Coal Company.



The Queer Movement

OBS has strived to be true to its organizing principles and values when it comes to the LGBTQA+ community. This was made possible due to its relationships with respected queer radicals—Black and white, locally and nationally—who helped deepened our understanding about queer issues. They schooled the organizations on the manifestations of homophobia and heterosexism, and how to be effective allies.

When Terri Coates was on the planning committee for St. Louis Pride, OBS supported Coates’ efforts to bring respected lesbian organizer Barbara Smith to speak at the Pride event in 2001. By then, Smith had already broken ties with the mainstream gay movement for its unprincipled relationship with corporations and its attention to a narrow, privileged sector of largely white gay men. The hope was that Smith would shake up the race



OBS held a Pamoja Session in 2006, “Blackness & Homophobia,” organized by Anthony Galloway that included panelists Montague Simmons, Pam Merritt and Tonya Hutchison.

in the local LGBTQA+ movement. There had never been a speaker of color before Smith or since. St. Louis PRIDE has become more reactionary, calling the cops on Black Lives Matters and pro-Palestinian activists in recent years.

OBS has continued its support of Black Pride and other groups in the queer movement, like the Erise Williams & Associates.

In 2005, OBS received a generous donation from one of its queer comrades to advance its LGBTQA+ work. OBS named it the Audre Lorde Project, and a young, energetic brother was selected to lead the education and bridge-building, to educate people on the harm of homophobia. Anthony Garrison had already been doing similar organizing in various roles. The project also connected OBS in a deeper way with Black Pride because Galloway was the president at that time.

OBS is internationalist and Pan-Africanist in its worldview. The same white supremacist global capitalists that dominate in the U.S. are the same ones that developing nations face in their own struggles for national liberation and self-determination. The United States has historically supported the dictatorships of Haiti, El Salvador, Iran, Iraq, Chile, North Korea, Zaire, South Africa, Syria, Saudi Arabia and the Philippines to name a few. It has been estimated that the U.S. supports 73 percent of the world's dictatorships.



Because we are descendants of Africans, the continent maintains a centrality in the work. One major way that the U.S. keeps a grip on its exploitation of Africa's rich resources is by propping up neo-colonialist African governments and programs like AFRICOM. Through military coups, it has also eliminated leaders who fought for their country's liberation or for the unification of the African continent. The African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC) was an important vehicle to educate people about the struggles in the homeland and how to support them. As a continuing part of ALSC from CAP to OBS, members have helped to organize African Liberation Day since 1972. As an NBUF chapter, OBS helped to organize the cultural boycott of U.S. entertainers who performed in South Africa during the apartheid regime. To highlight the historic connection to Africa, OBS also hosted speakers at its anniversary celebrations who were active in liberation struggles in Africa. For its role in bringing down apartheid, OBS received a special invitation after Nelson Mandela's release to the U.S. tour rally in Detroit (1990).



With taxpayers dollars, the U.S. government has provided financial aid, arms and military assistance to help these authoritarian regimes exploit, oppress and brutalize their own citizens. It has always presented various boogey men to justify its military invasions and the boosting of its defense budget. That budget is higher than the combined budgets of China, Japan, Russia, India, Saudi Arabia, United Kingdom, France, Ukraine and Germany. OBS has been steadfast in its opposition to U.S. military aggression, invasions (directly or indirectly) and its support of non-democratic regimes. The invasion of Grenada, the bombings of Libya and Iraq, the unconditional support of Israel in its annihilation of Palestine, have all been condemned.



OBS has actively supported the rights of immigrants and refugees in this country. The flood of these citizens from their homelands has everything to do with U.S. foreign policy creating an unstable and unsafe environment to live.

U.S. imperialism is a threat to world peace and the sovereignty of indigenous tribal nations and independent countries.



The role of revolutionary culture in the struggle for self-determination and democracy is part of OBS' DNA. While members of the Congress of African People, they were under the mentorship of Amira and Amina Baraka—two prominent figures in the national Black Arts Movement. The founders were among the first in St. Louis to celebrate Kwanzaa. The members helped to create the Proletarian Ensemble which later became the Infrared Rockers. OBS lifted up Black Culture, whether it was theater, spoken word, art, music or independent films. In the practice of the culture, OBS hosted rituals and ceremonies such as Kwanzaa Celebration, Libations and Naming Ceremonies. The artistic roles of cultural workers helps to amplify the informational and inspirational messages that draw people into the struggle for freedom, justice and human rights.



A few of the Spoken Word Poets who have performed at OBS events: Tef Poe, Cheryl Walker, Cheeraz Gorman, and Grace duMaine.



TISHAURA O.
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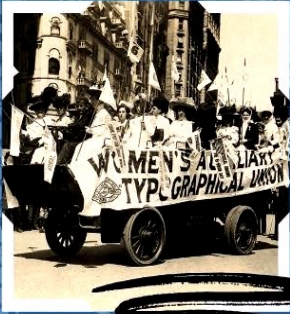
In Memory of Jerry Tucker

1938-2012

St. Louis Labor Hero ► Catalyst for the New Directions (UAW Caucus) ► National Labor Strategist
“represented the very best of the American working class”



Jerry Tucks chatted with labor activist Meizhu Lui at the Rowan Community Center during a national labor meeting in 2013.



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Bernice Johnson Reagon, celebrating Ella Baker

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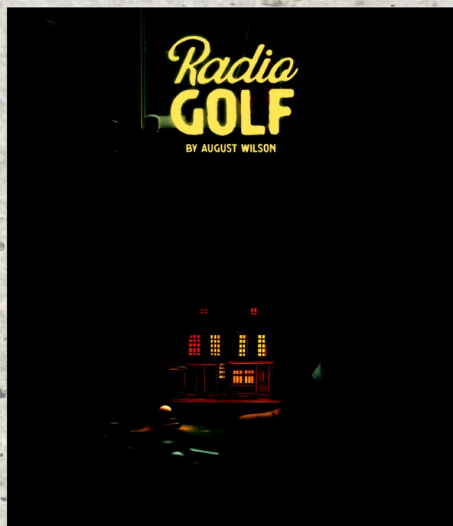
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MAY 14-JUNE 1, 2025

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from the Battlefield

*your host
Jamala Rogers*

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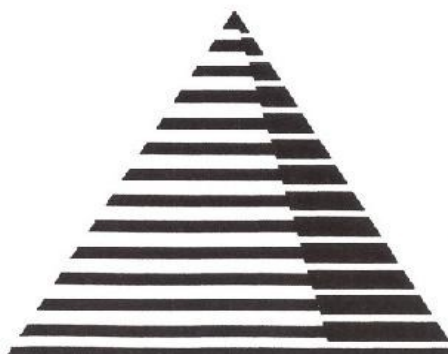
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