



ROMEO
IS BLEEDING

A Study Guide

for

CFI Education A Place in the World

Prepared by Roberta McNair



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About the Film



Crew

Director **Jason Zeldes**
Producers **Michael Klein**
Cinematographer **Rajiv Smith-Mahabir**
Editors **Kevin Klauber, Jason Zeldes**

Jason Zeldes is a documentary director and editor, best known for editing the 2013 Academy Award®-winning film, *Twenty Feet from Stardom*. The film earned Zeldes an ACE Award for Best Edited Documentary Feature, and led to other exciting collaborations, including work with the Oceanic Preservation Society on *Racing Extinction* which premiered at Sundance 2015. Prior to his editing career, Jason worked as an assistant to acclaimed filmmakers such as Doug Blush, Kirby Dick, and Patrick Creadon. *Romeo Is Bleeding* is Jason's directorial debut.

Michael Klein recently produced a short film titled *Dog Food* which premiered at the 2014 SXSW film festival, directed by Brian

Crano and starring Amanda Seyfried, Cory Michael Smith, and David Craig. Michael received a BA in Cinema-Television Production from the University of Southern California. He has produced music videos for notable artists such as the Stone Temple Pilots and Ice Water. Michael has produced and directed commercials for clients such as AT&T and American Express. He has also worked in documentary television on the ABC series *Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution* and most recently as a production coordinator for BBC America on the series *Richard Hammond's Crash Course*.

Rajiv Smith-Mahabir (or Jeeves as he's commonly known), is a cinematographer/editor who has worked in the narrative, documentary, and commercial worlds after graduating from USC's School of Cinematic Arts in 2007. He has shot and edited videos for top brand clients such as Nike, Clorox, Hyatt, VEVO, and the San Francisco Board of Tourism, to name a few. Coming from an editing background, he is extremely familiar with the necessary framework of storytelling, and knows exactly where to place the camera in order to capture the action in the best way possible. He is currently editing the feature documentary *Blindspot: Illusions of Justice*. Originally from the Bay Area, Jeeves was thrilled to return to his home town to work on *Romeo is Bleeding*.

Kevin Klauber has edited documentaries such as the 2013 Academy Award®-winning documentary *Twenty Feet from Stardom*, Cameron Crowe's *Pearl Jam Twenty*, and the HBO Rolling Stone's documentary *Crossfire Hurricane*. He won the 2014 ACE Award for Best Editing in a Documentary Feature and in 2012 was nominated by the WGA EAST for the feature documentary he co-wrote and co-edited *Beauty Is Embarrassing*. Kevin has also been nominated twice for the Golden Reel Award in sound editing by the MPSE.

<http://www.romeoisbleedingfilm.com/about/crew/>,
[Romeo Is Bleeding Kickstarter Video](#), [Poet Donte' Clark](#)

[and Director Jason Zeldes from the documentary "Romeo is Bleeding" - YouTube](#)

'Romeo Is Bleeding' Director Documents Richmond's RAW Talent

By Jeffrey Edalatpour
April 28, 2015
KQED Arts

At their grandmother's 80th birthday party, Jason Zeldes, director of the new film *Romeo Is Bleeding*, chatted with his cousin Molly Raynor, a Bay Area poet and teacher, about one of her students. Poet and playwright Donté Clark was working on an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* set in Richmond, California. Intrigued, Zeldes traveled from Los Angeles to the Bay Area and found the subject of his first documentary feature.

Zeldes' film moves inside the community of Richmond, into the classrooms, the homes, the streets and, crucially, the lives of the people who dwell there. The audience experiences Richmond through Donté's eyes, watching his efforts to transform the grief and pain of a turf war into a more hopeful future through the optimism of his artistry.

I spoke with Zeldes about his craft, the genesis of *Romeo Is Bleeding* (premiering Apr. 29 at El Cerrito High School) and his year in the Bay Area as a first-time director.

How did Molly Raynor and Donté Clark first meet?

Making Waves was an after school program meant to close the achievement gap. Molly was teaching a standard English curriculum, but she comes from a spoken word and creative writing background. So she pitched her bosses this idea of a poetry workshop, and they literally started in a closet.

What started as Molly and Donté in a janitor's closet, over the course of six or seven years now, has grown into a thriving artistic community with the goal of redefining how Richmond is perceived. They're definitely making real inroads.

How did the film come about then?

I had known about Donté Clark for a long time ... [Molly] wrote to the family about him: He was her first student. I would help them out when RAW Talent (Richmond Artists with Talent, a music and performing arts program for Richmond youth) was doing their smaller poetry shows. But it was in the summer of 2012 when Molly came up to me and said, "You're not going to believe what Donté is up to."

The more she described it the more it sounded cinematic. I asked her at that point if she would mind if I came up with cameras and did some exploratory filming. And she said, "I was really hoping you'd say that." A couple of weeks after that I was in Richmond for the first time. It was actually August 6, 2012, the day the Chevron refinery caught on fire.

How did the students react to the refinery fire? Was their response different from yours and your crew?



One of the amazing things about this project was I went there to explore this artist and his universe and discovered an entire world.

There was a lot of joking around about this traumatic event because it was certainly not the first time that's happened. I remember a lot of the kids wondering if they were going to get "18 Money." When the refinery caught fire a generation ago, everyone got checks on their 18th birthday from the refinery.

People were making jokes about how they didn't bring their inhaler to school that day. But even that goes into a much darker story of environmental injustice. The asthma rates in

Richmond are through the roof against national averages. One of the amazing things about this project was I went there to explore this artist and his universe and discovered an entire world.

Before you started production, what was your impression of the city of Richmond?

I knew that it occupies an interesting place in American history. It did build 90 percent of the Navy during World War II. I know that like so many cities across the country, including my hometown, Detroit, there is a real post-industrial decline. After the war, you see these industrial areas slowly shifting until they are left desolate with a lot of social justice issues. It's one of the leading cities for green industry. But the world that this film lives in was the North versus Central turf war. That was what I discovered when I arrived.

Then I spent time with Molly and her students, and we developed our relationships with the students independently of Molly. They started inviting me into their lives. The deeper and deeper I got into these communities and the more relationships I built and the more connections I made, the more I wanted to show that life and the context that Donté is drawing from for this adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, not just the social justice issues that exist in the neighborhood.



You achieve a great sense of ease and naturalism with the students.

We sat in the classroom every single day, hanging out, talking, laughing around with

everybody, and then when something of interest would happen, we would pick up our equipment and start rolling. Our level of investment as filmmakers really showed to the RAW Talent students that this mattered to us. At a certain point, they stopped noticing cameras were even there and I think that's when we started getting the best stuff.

The camera placement is particularly alive and fluid.

I have the advantage of working as a film editor. I've worked for a lot of amazing doc directors over the course of the last seven years. As an editor I get to see all of their footage. Usually, I'm the boom guy and I bring my friends who are really good cinematographers with me. They're framing up a shot and that gives me a nice perspective to be in the room and look at it through my editing eye and say, "This is the space the scene exists in."

How did working as an editor on the Academy Award-winning documentary *20 Feet from Stardom* inform your work on this film?

Some of the DNA of *20 Feet* lives in *Romeo*. Obviously, they are very different movies—but the way that we would showcase a musical performance in *20 Feet*—we tried to preserve that in showcasing the poetry of the RAW Talent students. We would choose to feature a poem and then structure an entire scene around the best way to contextualize this particular piece of poetry.

You include many establishing shots of Richmond, including public transportation, BART trains and stations. Any intentional references to Fruitvale Station?

Public transportation is just so much a part of the culture for the RAW Talent students that it would be disingenuous to not include that. In a more broad context, Oscar Grant and Fruitvale [are] so much part of the East Bay culture that I think it, yes, absolutely evokes that. All of the social justice issues that come into play for Oscar Grant, they come into play for Donté Clark and D'Neise Robinson and all of the

students at RAW Talent. I didn't shy away from that.

The film also includes interviews with officers from the Richmond Police Department.

After we gathered all of the footage, our main goal in assembling it into a film was to honor the complexity of the situation. In the context of this film, the systematic problems that exist in Richmond have developed since World War II. There's got to be a paradigm shift in the thinking that goes into solving problems in this community. It was very important for us to be fair with the Richmond Police Department. They were incredible in giving us access to what they were doing and speaking honestly about it.

After being immersed in the cultural life of Richmond, are you feeling optimistic for the students and their future?

My takeaway after watching Donté go through this journey, when we capture him at a real crossroads and he's experiencing growing pains as a community leader, these problems aren't going to be addressed with a quick fix. And the power of the individual attacking the problem is, of course, limited, but it doesn't reduce its value. There is still incredible value in him inspiring another generation of kids. Donté inherited a culture that's based more on trauma and despair. But he found a way to turn that trauma and despair into inspirational artwork. His hope is that the generation that he is influencing will propagate that. And future generations can inherit a culture that is made of more poetry and beauty.

<http://ww2.kqed.org/arts/2015/04/28/romeo-is-bleeding-director-jason-zeldes-and-richmonds-raw-talent/>

Cast

Donté Clark, Molly Raynor, D'Neise Robinson, Deandre Evans

Donté Clark is a poet, emcee, educator and activist from Richmond, California. As a founding member and artistic director of the RAW Talent Creative Arts Program, Donté wears many hats—coordinating shows and

field trips, teaching poetry and theater workshops to low-income youth in his community and coaching his students to find their voices through performance and publication. Donté is a well-known spoken word poet and emcee in the Bay Area—he is asked to perform at schools, conferences, poetry readings and hip hop shows on a regular basis. He was accepted to the VONA program, a prestigious week-long conference for writers of color. Donté's primary focus is ending the violence that has plagued his community and impacted him deeply—he uses his art and curriculum as a call to action. In the last few years, Donté hosted a town hall on violence in Richmond and took the lead with planning and writing the majority of the script for *Té's Harmony*. This year he wrote and directed a new play, *Po'Boys Kitchen*, which



premiered in March 2014. He continues to spark such critical dialogue and encourages his students to do the same.

[Donté Clark - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

Molly Raynor is a poet, educator and community leader. She has facilitated creative writing workshops in prisons, juvenile facilities, halfway houses, high schools, teen centers and summer camps and has traveled from coast to coast performing spoken word and organizing youth slams. She's a two-time Ann Arbor youth poetry slam champion and has coached both the Ann Arbor youth team and the University of Michigan slam team. She's published two poetry collections and has been featured on National Public Radio. Molly graduated with a

Bachelors degree from the University of Michigan in 2006, where she created her own major, entitled "Critical Pedagogy and Activism Through the Arts." After spending six years as a member and leader within several spoken word programs and collectives (the Volume Youth Poetry Project, Ann Arbor Wordworks, and The Cypher), Molly moved to the Bay Area in 2007, and founded RAW Talent in 2008. She is the recipient of a Jefferson Award for Public Service as well as a Teachers 4 Social Justice Award.



D'Neise Robinson and Molly Raynor

D'Neise Robinson is a celebrated poet, dancer, and performer from Richmond, CA. A graduate of Salesian High School, D'Neise now attends Sacramento State University and is pursuing a degree in psychology. She starred in *Té's Harmony*, playing the role of Harmony (the *Té's Harmony* equivalent of Juliet), and in doing so proved to herself and her community that there's more strength in being vulnerable. D'Neise remains a committed member of RAW Talent, serving as a costume designer, set designer, and choreographer for ongoing RAW Talent productions.

Deandre Evans, who starred in RAW Talent's most recent play *Po'Boys Kitchen*, is the youngest addition to the RAW Talent staff. He volunteered for a whole year before being hired because he was so invested in the program and the students that they serve. Deandre wrote a poem with Donté about the Richmond "soda tax" leading up to election day, which was filmed by the Bigger Picture

campaign, in collaboration with Youth Speaks. The video went viral in the Bay Area and now Deandre has been asked to perform the piece numerous times. Along with Donté, he is emerging as a well-respected voice in the important dialogue around food justice and health consciousness in Richmond. Deandre coordinated the first public RAW Talent open mic last year, creating a space for all young people in the community to express themselves and be heard by their peers. Deandre puts his whole heart into his teaching, community organizing, and writing. He is determined to create positive change and growth in his city.



Deandre Evans and Donté Clark

<http://www.romeoisbleedingfilm.com/about/thefilm/>
<http://www.romeoisbleedingfilm.com/about/the-cast/>

D'Neise Robinson

By Anne Hoffman

Posted April 30, 2013 1:00 pm

Richmond Confidential

D'Neise Robinson has something to say.

*Tornadoes ain't got sh*t on me.
I'm poverty.*

Her peers snap their fingers to show they're impressed by her skills. In the front row are some of her closest girlfriends, ready to perform their poetry at the RAW Talent slam. A few days earlier, a fellow slam student named Dimarea Young was gunned down close by. Police crowded his neighborhood, middle-aged

men openly regretted their involvement in the crack epidemic, and Young's girlfriend shrieked with rage and mourning.

Robinson keeps going.

Do you not see the damage he has caused to our family?

Drug epidemic, gun violence, my twin baby brothers locked behind bars

For life, to the system of greed.

Mommy, stand up.

Her voice sounds like it should belong to an older woman, a woman who's finally learned to trust her instincts and speak from her core after years of being told not to. But D'Neise is just a month away from her 18th birthday, not technically an adult.



D'Neise and Molly Raynor, her spoken word teacher, before a big slam competition. Photo by: Anne Hoffman.

These [photos](#) are the story of D'Neise Robinson: A slam poetry queen, a friend who roots the loudest for her girls, the actress playing Harmony in "Te's Harmony," a child who's grown up amidst tremendous violence. A success. This is the story of how a community invests in its young people; to build them up when everything around seems bent on tearing them down.

<http://richmondconfidential.org/2013/04/30/dneise-robinson/>

About the plays

Romeo and Juliet

PROLOGUE:

*“Two households, both alike in dignity,
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-cross’d lovers take their life;
Whose misadventured piteous overthrows
Do with their death bury their parents’ strife.
The fearful passage of their death-mark’d love,
And the continuance of their parents’ rage,
Which, but their children’s end, nought could
remove,
Is now the two hours’ traffic of our stage;
The which if you with patient ears attend,
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to
mend.”*

William Shakespeare states in the first lines what is going to happen in the next two hours: two children from feuding families—Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet—will meet, fall in love, and discover that each of them is an enemy to the others’ family, yet they will pursue their love into marriage. But the relentlessness of the grudge between these families will overtake and overwhelm them. They will believe that in their circumstances there is no option but death.



*Romeo fights Tybalt in 1968’s Romeo and Juliet,
directed by Franco Zeffereilli*

Blood gets spilled by each side: Juliet’s cousin Tybalt kills Romeo’s friend Mercutio, so Romeo kills Tybalt. Newly married Romeo and Juliet

spend one night with each other, but facing arrest for killing Tybalt, Romeo escapes to Padua. No matter what the well-meaning Friar Lawrence tries to do so that Romeo and Juliet can be together, the repercussions from Tybalt’s death thwart his attempts. The tragedy of Romeo and Juliet’s deaths stems wholly from this “ancient grudge.”



*Romeo holds Mercutio as he dies in 1996’s Romeo+Juliet,
directed by Baz Luhrmann*

In Verona, as in Richmond, a long-standing feud exists between two groups. In Verona, it is between two families, but the enmity extends beyond those related by blood; everyone associated with each family—from their friends to their servants—is ready to fight to the death because of this unexplained grudge.

Shakespeare gives no information about the cause of the grudge between the Montagues and Capulets. While it is possible that family members know the origin, it is doubtful that those beyond the families do. Each side, out of loyalty to one family or the other, takes part in the violence that the long-standing feud creates. It seems that it is enough that the grudge exists: Neither side seems to question acting against the other side, because loyalty to the family is what’s important. This loyalty has created hatred on sight. Simply knowing that someone is “the enemy” is enough to result in hatred strong enough to incite deadly action.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, the feud only indirectly affects the people of Verona. Having sword fights occurring on the streets of the city disrupts day-

to-day life, but the risk to those not involved in the feud is present but minor.

Té's Harmony

In Richmond, the feud is between two neighborhoods: North Richmond and Central Richmond, divided from one another by railroad tracks, are in a turf war. Instead of family determining loyalty, in Richmond it is along neighborhood gang lines that the rift was created.

The turf war's origins are unclear. Some remember a dispute going back to the 1970s; others cite a more recent, trivial offense resulting in tarnished honor that has led to ongoing deadly overreaction. In the present, anyone can fall victim to this war between gangs. And it is war, because it is in war that "collateral damage" occurs: Whether or not residents of North or Central Richmond are aligned with a gang, any one of them in their neighborhood can be killed in a drive-by shooting, because this war is fought with guns.



Té and Harmony

Nearly everyone in North Richmond and Central Richmond knows someone who has died violently. For some, family members have been killed. Some of those killed were in one gang or the other. But many of those killed during the years that the factions have been warring simply got in the way of a bullet. It's likely that few of those killed knew what started the enmity between North and Central Richmond, few in the

generation coming of age today seem to know about how it all started.

At the end of *Romeo and Juliet*, the Prince declares that the hatred between the Montagues and Capulets brought all of this about: Romeo, Juliet, Mercutio, Tybalt, Romeo's mother, and Paris all died because of their feud. He chides himself for letting it go on without taking action. Everyone has lost someone they love. "All are punish'd."

There is no Prince in Richmond who can end the gang war. The police can do no more than to try to anticipate trouble and do their best to remove killers from the street. The people who live in those neighborhoods are all-too aware that violence can erupt at any time, resulting in injury and death to those with no connection to the gangs except for where they live.

This is the modern tragedy that Donté Clark, his family, his friends, his former classmates, and his neighbors live every day. But Donté, unlike Shakespeare, is living this tragedy, and he can make choices that can affect his community.

For the sake of drama, Shakespeare needs Romeo and Juliet to die. The despair that the circumstances of their lives could never allow their love to go forward gives them no choice. But Donté and the others in RAW Talent can make a choice for life. Té and Harmony can make what is arguably the harder choice: to live and love in spite of the violence that choice can bring. In choosing life, they can influence others to make that choice, as well.

RAW Talent Presents ... "Té's Harmony"

By Serafin Macias

RICHMOND - "Té's Harmony" is a spoken word theater piece written and performed by RAW Talent, the creative arts department of the Making Waves Education Program, and directed by Rooben Morgan.

Members of RAW Talent will present their modern-day rendition of "Romeo and Juliet" for the stage, reworking the Shakespearean masterpiece into an allegory for the socio-

economic conditions haunting their city and their daily lives. It is the classic tale of star-crossed lovers when Té from North Richmond falls for Harmony from Central, and they must fight for love in the midst of a war that has devastated their community for too long.



The students of RAW Talent have been deeply impacted by violence in Richmond, and they are determined to continue demanding change through their art. After putting on poetry shows and town hall discussions around gun violence, poverty and the prison industrial complex, they have decided to address these issues facing their community through a new medium: theater. The students and staff have written their first play, a heart-breaking and at times humorous reflection of daily life in Richmond. "Té's Harmony" will push the boundaries of artistic genres, and ultimately push the audience to question the culture of violence in our city; to re-imagine Richmond through the lens of love.

While the play serves as a call to action for the audience, we will also move beyond the stage and have anti-violence community organizations onsite to offer resources and volunteer opportunities for those who are moved by what they see. We are also very excited to announce our key-note speaker who will open the evening—well known author, poet and activist, Luis J. Rodriguez. Rodriguez has witnessed first-hand how communities can be transformed through creative expression.

"'Té's Harmony' is just such an example of how the arts energize and harmonize. How

naturally and poignantly young people turn to words, stories, songs, or performance, especially in the most dire and derelict of places. In the shadows can come much light, much music, much truth." —Luis J. Rodriguez

"Té's Harmony" will be a mash-up of theater, poetry, dance, music and film, remixing Shakespearean verse with spoken word and Richmond vernacular. The script pays homage to the canon while honoring and centering the language of Richmond youth. We will be publishing "Té's Harmony" as a book with Red Beard Press, a youth-run publishing press in Ann Arbor, Michigan. We believe that the script could be used by English teachers nationwide as supplemental curriculum alongside "Romeo and Juliet," to engage students in the classic story and help them make connections between the text and their lived realities.

*Teachers and youth workers who want to bring groups can contact RAW Talent coordinator Molly Raynor at mraynor@making-waves.org or (734) 395-5899 for more info on group discounts.

http://richmondprogressivealliance.net/info_archives/RPA103_MyrickFillsVacancy.html

About Richmond

History

Richmond was founded and incorporated in 1905, carved out of Rancho San Pablo, from which the nearby town of San Pablo inherited its name. In 1930 the Ford Motor Company opened an assembly plant called Richmond Assembly Plant which moved to Milpitas in the 1960s. The old Ford plant has been a National Historic Place since 1988. The city was a small town until the onset of World War II, which brought on a rush of migrants and a boom in the industrial sector. Standard Oil set up operations here in 1901, including a what is now the Chevron Richmond Refinery and tank farm, which are still operated by Chevron. There is a pier into San Francisco Bay south of Point Molate for oil tankers. The western terminus of the Santa Fe Railroad was established in Richmond with ferry connections at Ferry Point in the Brickyard Cove area of Point Richmond to San Francisco.



Chevron refinery in North Richmond, CA

At the outset of World War II, the four Richmond Shipyards were built along the Richmond waterfront, employing thousands of workers, many recruited from all over the United States, including many African-Americans and women entering the workforce for the first time. Many of these workers lived in specially constructed houses scattered throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, including Richmond, Berkeley, and Albany. A specially built rail line, the Shipyard Railway,

transported workers to the shipyards. Kaiser's Richmond shipyards built 747 Victory and Liberty ships for the war effort, more than any other site in the U.S. The city broke many records and even built one Liberty ship in a record five days. On average, the yards could build a ship in 30 days. The medical system established for the shipyard workers at the Richmond Field Hospital eventually became today's Kaiser Permanente HMO. It remained in operation until 1993, when it was replaced by the modern Richmond Medical Center hospital.



Kaiser Shipyard, Richmond, CA

Point Richmond was originally the commercial hub of the city, but a new downtown arose in the center of the city. It was populated by many department stores such as Kress, J.C. Penney, Sears, Macy's, and Woolworth's. During the war the population increased dramatically and peaked at around 120,000 by the end of the war. Once the war ended, the shipyard workers were no longer needed, beginning a decades-long population decline. The Census listed 99,545 residents in 1950. By 1960 much of the temporary housing built for the shipyard workers was torn down, and the population dropped to about 71,000. Many of the people who moved to Richmond were Black and came from the Midwest and

South. Most of the white men were overseas at war, and this opened up new opportunities for ethnic minorities and women. This era also brought with it the innovation of daycare for children, as a few women could care for several dozen women's children, while most of the mothers went off to work in the factories and shipyards.



Macdonald Ave., Richmond, CA 1956

The Pullman Company also established a major facility in Richmond in the early 20th century. The facility connected with both the Santa Fe and Southern Pacific and serviced their passenger coach equipment. The Pullman Company was a large employer of African American men, who worked mainly as porters on the Pullman cars. Many of them settled in the East Bay, from Richmond to Oakland, prior to World War II.

In 2006 the city celebrated its centennial. This coincided with the repaving and streetscaping project of Macdonald Avenue. The city's old rundown commercial district along Macdonald has been designated the city's "Main Street District" by the state of California. This has led to funding of improvements in the form of state grants.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richmond,_California
[The Iron Triangle: Richmond's Forgotten Neighborhood | North Gate News Online](#)
[Richmond, CA - Official Website](#)
[Iron Triangle, Richmond, California - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)
[Long after recovery, the housing wealth gap in Richmond is worse than ever | Richmond Confidential](#)
[History of Richmond | Richmond, CA - Official Website](#)

[Richmond Shipyard Number Three: World War II in the San Francisco Bay Area: A National Register of Historic Places Travel Itinerary](#)
[Our History - Kaiser Permanente Share](#)

Health

Richmond, California has a long history of industrial activity—particularly the petrochemical industry—and its consequent pollution. Contra Costa County, which includes Richmond, is second only to Los Angeles County for the distinction of being the most industrialized California County. Contra Costa is also home to five refineries and the largest refinery west of the Mississippi River.

Richmond residents have been burdened by the impacts of environmental pollution for decades, and have been struggling to achieve a healthy and just environment. In particular, elevated rates of health problems—most notably child and adult asthma—in Richmond have driven Richmond residents' environmental justice struggle.

Numerous pollutants from a multitude of local sources identified by respondents, including the Chevron refinery, the Santa Fe train, and diesel trucks along the Richmond parkway, are likely linked to these health problems.



Atchison Village, Collins Street, Richmond, CA

During World War II many people migrated to the Bay Area to take military jobs, but Black families were only allowed to buy homes in Richmond. In fact, the homes in Atchison Village and Liberty Village were all originally built for wartime housing. Richmond has a

significantly larger non-white population than greater Contra Costa County: 36% of Richmond residents are African-American and 27% are Latino, as compared to 9% and 18%, respectively, for the greater county. Furthermore, 26% of Richmond residents live below the poverty line. When considering the Chevron refinery in particular, 79% of people within one mile of the refinery are people of color, and over 25% are below the national poverty line.

Communities for a Better Environment has calculated that there are over 350 toxic sites in Richmond, with the California Department of Toxic Substances Control identifying 41 and the City of Richmond identifying 11 more. These myriad pollutants affect an already vulnerable community where the closest full service grocery store is beyond walking distance and where access to health care is limited.

<http://www.cbecal.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Richmond-Health-Survey.pdf>
[Asthma Contra Costa - California Breathing](#)

Crude Oil

... Crude oil is a dark yellow-to-black oily liquid that is usually found in natural underground reservoirs. It was formed when the remains of animals and plants from millions of years ago were covered by layers of sand. Heat and pressure from these layers turned the remains into crude oil. This process is why crude oil is called a fossil fuel. Crude oil

is extracted and used to make fuel and other petroleum products. ...

Crude oil is a mixture of a wide variety of constituents. It consists primarily of hydrocarbons, which are chemicals composed of hydrogen and carbon. Crude oil also contains hundreds of substances that include benzene, chromium, iron, mercury, nickel, nitrogen, oxygen, sulfur, toluene, and xylene. Total petroleum hydrocarbons is a term used to describe the several hundred chemical compounds that originally come from crude oil.

There are four types of crude oil:

- Class A: Light, Volatile Oils: These oils are highly fluid and highly toxic to humans and include jet fuel and gasoline.
- Class B: Non-Sticky Oils: These oils are waxy and less toxic to humans and include diesel fuel and light crude oil.
- Class C: Heavy, Sticky Oils: These oils are brown or black and sticky or tarry and include most crude oils. Their toxicity is low, but if spilled, their impacts on waterfowl and wildlife can be severe.
- Class D: Non-Fluid Oils: These oils are non-toxic and include heavy crude oils. They are difficult to clean up, and if spilled, their impacts on waterfowl and wildlife can be severe.

Crude oil is refined to produce gasoline, diesel fuel, jet fuel, residential fuel oil, kerosene, liquefied petroleum gases such as



propane, and other sources of energy to produce heat or electric power. It is also used to make lubricants, waxes, ink, crayons, eyeglasses, tires, CDs and DVDs, ammonia, dishwashing liquid, and some health and personal care products. The United States is the third top crude oil-producing country after Russia and Saudi Arabia.

You can be exposed to crude oil if you live near an oil refinery or if there is an oil spill or leak nearby. You can be exposed if you eat contaminated seafood. Most exposure to crude oil is through total petroleum hydrocarbons and crude oil byproducts such as gasoline, oil products, heating sources, or consumer products. Everyone is exposed to total petroleum hydrocarbons from many sources. ...

You can be exposed to crude oil if you work in an oil refinery, on an oil drilling rig, or on an offshore oil facility. Exposure at work can occur through contact with the skin, ingestion, or breathing crude oil liquid, drops, or fumes. ...

Exposure to crude oil may irritate the eyes, skin, and respiratory system. It may cause dizziness, rapid heart rate, headaches, confusion, and anemia. Prolonged skin contact with crude oil may cause skin reddening, edema, and burning of the skin.

When crude oil is burned, either accidentally or as a spill control measure, it emits chemicals that affect human health. These chemicals include carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, lead, nitrogen oxides, particulate matter, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, sulfur dioxide, and volatile organic compounds.

If you are exposed to burning crude oil, you may be exposed to high levels of particulate matter and may experience the health effects of particulate matter. Exposure to burning crude oil may harm the passages of the nose, airways, and lungs. It may cause shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, coughing, itching, red or watery eyes, and black mucous. ...

If you think your health has been affected by exposure to crude oil, contact your health care professional.

https://toxtown.nlm.nih.gov/text_version/chemicals.php?id=73
[Oil Refineries - Health effects](#)
[Oil Causes Serious Health Problems - Hesperian Health Guides](#)
[Leukemia: The price of living close to an oil refinery? — Environmental Health News](#)
[About | Healthy Richmond](#)

Chevron

Environmental Justice Case Study: West County Toxics Coalition and the Chevron Refinery

Background

[Between 1989 and 1996, there were] 35 major industrial accidents in Contra Costa County, California. This makes it one of the most dangerous places to live in the nation. In fact, between 1989 and 1995, there were over 1,900 different incidents reported in the county, making it the eleventh worst area in the entire United States with regards to toxic accidents.



Smoke billows from Chevron's refinery during its August 6, 2012 explosion

One of the worst industrial offenders is Chevron. The oil company operates a refinery and other industrial facilities in Richmond, California. Chevron stores over 11 million pounds of toxic, explosive, and corrosive chemicals at this refinery, often very close to large population centers. When it accidentally releases these chemicals into the environment, Chevron endangers the lives of the local community members.

In fact, Chevron had 304 accidents between 1989 and 1995—major fires, spills, leaks, explosions, toxic gas releases, flaring, and air contamination. The people of Richmond are subject to severe injuries and illnesses. As Henry Clark, leader of the West County Toxics Coalition, reported after a toxic release in 1992, “There’s stuff here that’s deadlier than (in) Bhopal.” (Bhopal was the site of the Union Carbide chemical leak in 1984 that killed 2,000 people and injured 20,000 more.) Richmond was an area waiting to explode.



Problem

In 1993, Chevron made plans to increase its chemical storage and the number of hazardous chemicals in the Richmond area. It claimed that it was just trying to comply with the mandates of the Clean Air Act. In the company’s opinion, it was all part of the process of developing a cleaner burning gas to stop the air pollution problem in the San Francisco Bay Area. Unfortunately these changes were going to pose increased risks to the local community. This community was mostly poor and mostly African American. It was a clear case of environmental injustice.

The stage was set for a confrontation. The local citizens were going to battle for their lives—for their health, for their safety, and for the future of their town.

Key Actors

- The West County Toxics Coalition ...
- Communities for a Better Environment (CBE) ...
- Golden Gate University Environmental Law and Justice Clinic ...
- Chevron

One of the largest oil companies in the world, Chevron operates refineries and industrial plants in Richmond, California, in close proximity to a poor, African-American community. Chevron is a large multinational corporation, with profits in the billions of dollars. Chevron is also one of the wealthiest companies in the world—a member of the Fortune 500. The company has spent millions of its dollars on a populist advertising campaign to promote its concern for environmental issues. “Do people care about the environment?” Chevron asks in its ads. Then it answers its own rhetorical question: “People do.” (Community groups have responded with protest signs that say “Do people destroy the environment? People do.”)

Demographics

Richmond, California is located on the San Francisco Bay, just across the Richmond–San Rafael Bridge from wealthy Marin County. However, Richmond itself is anything but wealthy. The community that lives within the zip code 94801 is one of the poorest in the state. According to the 1990 United States census, 44.2 percent of all Richmond children under 18 years of age live in poverty. Not coincidentally, this is the same zip code in which Chevron owns and operates its refinery. The red pin [in the map (*above, left*)] shows the location both of this community and of the Chevron facilities.

Strategies

The West County Toxics Coalition used several strategies in its successful fight against Chevron:

1. Try To Work It Out with the Polluter

The first strategy was to sit down at the table with Chevron. The citizens of Richmond wanted to express their concerns for their health and safety. ...

Essentially, the members of the West County Toxics Coalition asked for a policy of zero net emissions. The citizens were completely supportive of Chevron's cleaner burning fuel programs, so long as the development of these programs did not endanger their health. They did not want any increased risks to the Richmond community. Therefore, they requested some mitigations from Chevron: the repair of leaking pumps and valves, the shutdown of older parts of the Chevron plant, etc.

Chevron refused to cooperate. This strategy was unsuccessful.

2. Lobby the public officials

What could the citizens of Richmond do next? Chevron refused to listen to their concerns. The local residents thought of an alternative strategy: They would lobby the Planning Commission for the City of Richmond. After all, Chevron needed a land use permit from the city in order to carry out its operations. ...

The Planning Commission agreed with the citizens. They ordered Chevron to pour \$50 million into community development in order to be granted the new land use permit. This strategy was successful because of the power and influence of the community organizing, as well as the hard scientific and legal expertise behind the citizens' efforts. The West County Toxics Coalition had the power of numbers behind them—mobilizing hundreds of citizens to these Planning Commission boards, and working with the local environmental groups like CBE and the Golden Gate Law Clinic. These were the two other successful parts of the citizens' strategy:

3. Mobilize hundreds of concerned citizens

The West County Toxics Coalition was able to successfully lobby the Planning Commission

in Richmond because it could rally hundreds of committed, impassioned citizens. This is the foundation of any good community organizing effort. ...



West County Toxics Coalition's Henry Clark, right, and others protest against Chevron.

4. Find allies with legal and scientific expertise

Too often community groups do not have access to legal power or scientific data that will support their cause. By making allies with so many groups in the San Francisco Bay Area, WCTC was able to overcome these traditional barriers to power. ...

Strengths and Weaknesses of these Strategies

The West County Toxics Coalition did an outstanding job of mobilizing the community. It quickly attracted the attention of local media and activists to the nature of the problem. It put pressure on public officials to rule in its favor. Moreover, it scored a great coup in recruiting important allies from the legal and scientific community. All of these were important in the success of the Richmond citizens' efforts.

However, the victory would prove to be short-lived. The citizens of Richmond may have been excellent in resource mobilization with regards to people power, but Chevron had the power of money. Chevron appealed the Planning Commission decision at the City Council, and had the decision overturned. The wealthy corporation argued that the citizens were trying to "extort \$50 million" and denied

that it had any responsibility to mitigate the problem.

The citizens still won a historic battle (see **Solutions** below), but it was not as large as anticipated. Chevron did not respect the West County Toxics Coalition and it tried to discredit their efforts altogether. Chevron had a history of giving local politicians large campaign contributions, and it always threatened to leave town if the citizens became too disruptive. So the strategy was weak in its ability to deal with the larger problem of corporate control of City Hall. ...



Richmond protesters descend on Chevron executive's Lafayette home

Solutions

In a historic agreement, Chevron agreed to pay up to \$5 million to community development projects in Richmond. This money would help fund such important local projects as:

- the Martin Luther King, Jr. Health Center
- more jobs and job training for local community members
- reduced toxic emissions in the area
- pollution prevention measures
- safety improvements at the Chevron plant,
- community beautification projects around the Chevron facilities, and
- police and youth athletic leagues.

The West County Toxics Coalition had succeeded in getting millions of dollars for the local community. Chevron did not pay the full \$50 million that the citizens had initially

demanded, but they still had achieved a major breakthrough. Chevron had promised comprehensive economic benefits for members of the fence-line communities. The full details of the project are enumerated in a Memorandum of Understanding reached on June 2, 1994.

In the aftermath of this agreement, the West County Toxics Coalition has continued to work with local citizens, scientific experts, and legal advocacy organizations to win further concessions from Chevron. In 1996, the citizens managed to shut down a dangerous Chevron incinerator that had been jeopardizing the health and safety of local residents for almost three decades. Working with Greenpeace and local community organizations, the residents of Richmond were able to mobilize enough support to close down the hazardous facility. They sent more than 1,500 letters to the California EPA, urging an Environmental Impact Report, plans for immediate closure of the incinerator, and community participation in the project. Two weeks later, Chevron announced it would shut down the incinerator by 1997. The residents of Richmond are currently working in close collaboration with the California EPA to finalize plans for the closure.

Recommendations

Other communities involved in environmental justice struggles could learn a lot from the successes in Richmond, California. The West County Toxics Coalition has been successful for a number of reasons:

- its emphasis on forging alliances with scientific and legal experts
- its mobilization of up to a thousand community members around an issue
- its organizing efforts to influence the opinion of public officials
- its attempts to attract media attention to its cause.

In the future, Richmond residents may find that another good strategy is to take power into their own hands. They may wish to work towards electing a local candidate for City Council, as well as other candidates

sympathetic to their cause. They may also choose to increase media attention to their cause. In the progressive circles of the San Francisco Bay Area, they may find many more allies willing to support them, if only people are made aware of the injustices being perpetrated. ... Citizens of Richmond should continue to sit down at the table with employees of Chevron in order to construct a positive, proactive vision of the future. Rather than fighting each other—pouring time and resources into costly, energy-draining battles—they should work together to fight the common problems they share. As Richmond residents have discovered with their victory in the “Clean Fuels” case, Chevron has a lot of power and money that could be used for the good of the community. It’s better to have a relationship of goodwill and unity than one of antagonism and division.

<http://www.umich.edu/~snre492/sherman.html>
[What We Do | About Chevron Richmond | Chevron Richmond](#)
[Chevron’s role in childhood asthma hazy | Richmond Confidential](#)
[Chevron Richmond Refinery - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)
[Chevron Refinery Explosion Lawyers Serving Richmond CA Announce Free Settlement and Lawsuit Hotline for People Affected by the Chevron Explosion at the Richmond Refinery](#)
[Government: Brought to you by Chevron | Story of Stuff How Chevron swamps a small city with campaign money and bogus news - LA Times](#)
[A year after a refinery explosion, Richmond, Calif., is fighting back | Grist](#)

Community

RYSE Center turns three

By Evelyn Xiaoqing Pi

Richmond Confidential

Posted November 3, 2011 9:57 am

What’s the party like when an anniversary and Halloween are tied together? RYSE Center, a community-based development and educational center for youth, had its third anniversary event Saturday, with plenty of spooky elements—a haunted house, face painting and a costume contest—as well as a

bouncy house, musical chairs and a pie-eating contest.

The free event attracted dozens of people, who played games and danced. Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia and Richmond Mayor Gayle McLaughlin spoke. McLaughlin called RYSE “a perfect place, a safe place that helps young people to connect better.” She also said the center helped to nurture young people into “change-makers.”

During the last three years, RYSE has provided comprehensive programs for youth in the community, including arts, leadership and new media.

<http://richmondconfidential.org/2011/11/03/ryse-center-turns-three/>
[RYSE Center](#)
[RYSE Young Richmond artists rap for societal change | Richmond Confidential](#)
[RYSE mixtape collects beats from the heart | Richmond Confidential](#)
[RYSE Center/RAW Talent - Innocent Until: Why Black and Brown Lives Matter](#)
[RYSE-Youth film festival in Richmond highlights new voices | Richmond Confidential](#)

RAW Talent of Richmond

Jessie Ristau, December 02, 2011

Ella Baker Center for Human Rights



I was floored the first time I heard the students of RAW talent perform. The strength, power and passion emanating from these youths are truly moving. They tell the stories of those who are usually silenced and explore

both the roots of poverty and how it impacts them personally.

RAW Talent is a part of the larger Making Waves Education program, and serves youth from Richmond and Oakland. We are holding an event this Sunday that will be a show full of beautiful words, ugly truths and community healing—we will laugh, we will cry, and together we will move towards a more just future for Richmond. Please support the arts and the youth by joining us!

In addition, Bobby Seale, the founder of the Black Panther Party, will be joining us as the keynote speaker for this event.

To find out more, hear what Richmond Pulse has to say about RAW Talent, at <http://richmondpulse.org/new-poets/>
<http://ellabakercenter.org/blog/2011/12/raw-talent-of-richmond/>
[RAW Talent students perform poetry about incarceration in "From the Pen to the Page" | Richmond Confidential](#)
[RAW Talent - Romeo is Bleeding](#)
["Innocent Until – Why Black and Brown Lives Matter" unites youth and art | Richmond Confidential](#)
['Creative activism' a blast of reporting, poetry, theater - SFGate](#)
[The Poetry of Poverty | Richmond Pulse](#)
[Raw Talent's Second Verse | Richmond Pulse](#)
[Employment, RAW Talent, and Richmond California - YouTube](#)
[RYSE Center/RAW Talent - Innocent Until: Why Black and Brown Lives Matter](#)
[RAW Talent - I speak for the people](#)
[RAW Talent](#)

Gangs and crime

North Richmond: Most killings go unsolved in tiny enclave

By David DeBolt and Robert Rogers
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 04/05/2014 07:53:04 PM PDT

NORTH RICHMOND – This 1.5-square mile neighborhood began as a sparsely populated agricultural outpost and rapidly morphed into a bustling shantytown for African-American workers during and after World War II.

The swinging blues joints of the 1960s and '70s, however, slowly gave way to a

skyrocketing violent crime rate, once memorialized in a list of the dead on a corner grocery's outside wall. Today, the per-capita homicide rate here ranks among the highest in the nation. And there is one startling fact of life that has come to symbolize the neglect this community endures:

In North Richmond, killers are almost never brought to justice.

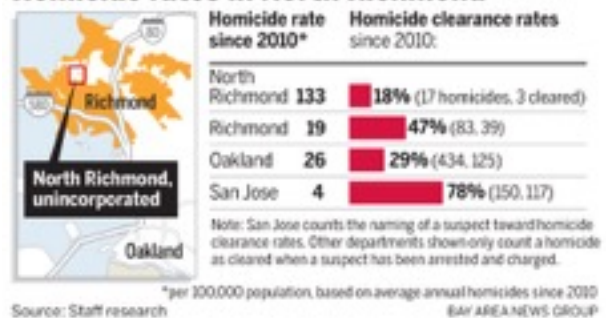
Since 2010, 19 people have been killed in this tiny community. Sixteen were African-American males who ranged in age from 16 to 51; all were shot. In only five of the 19 killings were charges filed, and two of those cases were handled by Richmond city police.

If North Richmond were a city, that "homicide clearance rate" would be the worst in the Bay Area. But North Richmond is an unincorporated community that gets its services from Contra Costa County and its law enforcement from the county sheriff.

That's not unusual—San Lorenzo in Alameda County and the Burbank neighborhood of San Jose are among a number of unincorporated communities nearby. But many think it is the root of North Richmond's problem.

"Everybody knows the sheriff just sits in the parking lot at the church and doesn't follow (after shootings)," said Lynn Hamilton, who has lost two stepsons to street killings in North Richmond.

Homicide rates in North Richmond

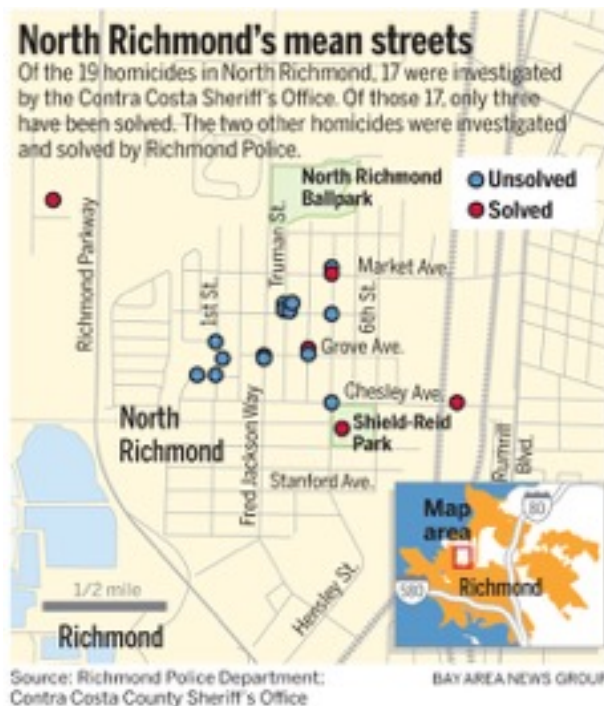


The deaths of 20-year-old Marquis Hamilton in 2011 and 23-year-old Nelson Earl Hamilton III, killed on March 8, remain

unsolved. "No mother should have to feel like I feel," she said.

Contra Costa Sheriff David Livingston, who was elected in June 2010, declined through a spokesman to comment for this story. But other residents and local officials agree with Hamilton that the Sheriff's Office is challenged in serving a pocket of land isolated from the other county areas the Martinez-based force has the responsibility to patrol.

For instance, while one sheriff's cruiser usually patrols the area, deputies must wait for backup before responding to a shooting. The policy, aimed at protecting officers, is criticized by residents, who say deputies sit idle as killers make their escape through one of three key streets.



The Sheriff's Office also does not offer reward money for information leading to arrests, unlike police departments in nearby Oakland and Richmond. Police in those two cities, which have a history of high homicide rates, made arrests in 29 percent and 47 percent, respectively, of killings since 2010. San Pablo, which is adjacent to North Richmond,

has the highest clearance rate in the Bay Area, at 86 percent.

The last homicide in North Richmond that resulted in an arrest was the April 2012 killing of 22-year-old Lonnie Peterson III, who was sprayed with bullets as he stood in front of a corner store. There have been five homicides since, including two so far this year.

Much of the violence stems from feuds between rivals in North Richmond and Central Richmond; gang members often retaliate for killings in their neighborhoods by striking back with drive-by shootings, police say.

North Richmond is a grid of craggy streets, public housing complexes and aging houses. And it's an area locals say has been underserved for decades.

Though it was a thriving community in its early days, only 3,200 people now live amid the rows of churches and corner stores. Rancho Market & Deli on Market Avenue was the site of Peterson's slaying and several others over the years, and once had a macabre list on the wall of dozens of names of young men killed in the neighborhood. That was painted over in 2011.

Residents have long been dissatisfied with law enforcement's work in the area, which they see as largely ineffectual and reactive.

Using the FBI's standard for homicide measurement, an average of a little more than four homicides per year in an area of North Richmond's size equals a rate of 133 killings per 100,000 people. The city of Richmond, which has just over 100,000 residents, has averaged about 32 homicides a year during the last decade, a time during which it has consistently ranked as one of the most dangerous cities in California.

North Richmond's recent homicide rate is no aberration. From 2005 to 2010, at least 28 homicides occurred in North Richmond.

Residents say shootings are a routine part of life in the neighborhood. Several of the young men killed in recent years had survived

gunshot wounds in the years before their deaths.

Multiple residents who spoke to this newspaper said that when gunfire rattles the neighborhood, nearby deputies do not rush to the scene.

“I have seen the sheriff’s cars go in the opposite direction of the shootings, or just sit in the parking lot,” said the Rev. Ken Davis, a North Richmond resident. “They don’t care about the young people getting killed here.”

Assistant Sheriff Mark Williams said North Richmond shootings are priority calls, and deputies who stay put in the moments after gunfire are following protocol in waiting for backup.

Williams said that per capita, North Richmond has more officers—four—patrolling the streets than any other area his office manages, despite cutbacks that mean the department has 100 fewer deputies today than it did in 2008.

“I can tell you that the caseload has not dropped. In fact, it’s increased,” Williams said

in his Martinez office recently. “(Investigations) take time.”

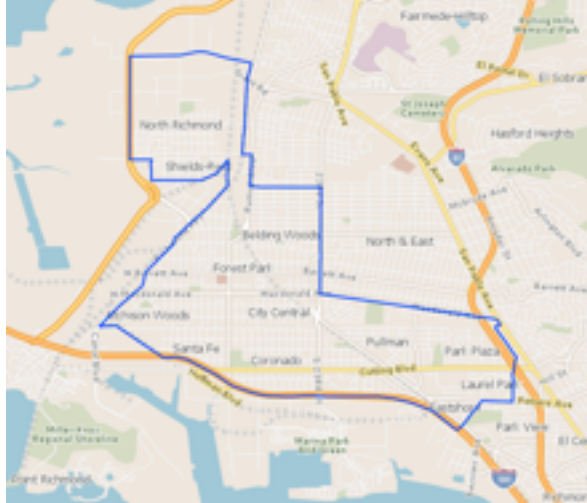
While they have not been officially solved, the Sheriff’s Office considers some of the 15 cases it has investigated since 2010 closed or nearly closed. Two additional cases during that period were handled by Richmond police because they fell in a small pocket of North Richmond they patrol; Richmond police made arrests in those cases.

An arrest warrant has been issued in a 2010 homicide but no arrest has been made, Williams said. Three suspects were arrested in connection to a 2010 triple homicide but prosecutors did not file charges; the men are in jail for other crimes, Williams said. In another case, the man detectives suspected in a slaying became a homicide victim himself.

Like other departments that struggle to solve homicide cases, Williams said, detectives have a hard time convincing shooting victims, their families and witnesses to give police basic information.



Henry Clark, a longtime environmental advocate in North Richmond, points to a lack of communication between residents and officers.



“With all the public knowledge around here about who is involved in these shootings, it is just unbelievable that more crimes aren’t solved,” Clark said. “Law enforcement just can’t seem to access that information.”

Over the years, some residents have suggested that the answer might be for the city of Richmond to annex North Richmond, but numerous efforts to make that happen were thwarted by a mix of resident distrust and opposition from business interests, which would face higher taxes in the city.

Richmond police Chief Chris Magnus favors having officers in his 189-member force routinely patrol North Richmond, but he is limited by the current mutual aid agreement with the Sheriff’s Office, which mostly centers on emergency response.

“I’d like to see North Richmond annexed into the city,” Magnus said, “I think over the long run it would allow for more cohesive policing services and better public safety outcomes, but that’s a political decision at the end of the day.

Others disagree.

Clark isn’t convinced that annexation is the answer, nor that Richmond police can do better than the Sheriff’s Office.

“For the RPD chief to say he could do a better job to the sheriff, I would say clean up your own backyard first,” Clark said.

Devone Boggan, the director of Richmond’s Office of Neighborhood Safety, a novel crime intervention unit that works with gang members to get them job training, said the biggest factor in North Richmond’s persistent violence is the county’s inability to invest in the community.

“In North Richmond, I see a place that is so void of opportunity to young people,” Boggan said.

John Gioia, a county supervisor, whose West County district includes North Richmond, said he believes residents would be better served if North Richmond were part of the city, but other opinions are mixed.

“I’ve heard from residents who appreciate the work they do, and those who want something better,” Gioia said. “There is not one uniform or overriding point of view.”

Regardless of who patrols the area, a public safety problem continues to mar this community.

Longtime resident Mariecelle Lowery, 40, lost her son, Ervin Coley III, 21, in a 2011 drive-by shooting. She worries about the future for her elementary school-aged son.

Standing by a picture of Ervin, mounted on the wall of her public housing apartment unit, Lowery said she has little hope his killer will be brought to justice.

“You just expect it” to go unsolved, Lowery said. “Kids get taken in this violence, and then the cycle continues.”

http://www.mercurynews.com/crime-courts/ci_25505065/north-richmond-most-killings-go-unsolved-tiny-enclave
[Richmond Crime Statistics: California \(CA\) - CityRating.com](#)
[North Richmond, CA Crime Rate Indexes - CLRSearch](#)

[North Richmond, California - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)
[Did This City Bring Down Its Murder Rate by Paying People Not to Kill? | Mother Jones](#)

Richmond mourns another, while gang tensions remain hot

By Julie Brown

Posted April 12, 2013 1:21 pm

Richmond Confidential

A crowd gathered in mourning on a street corner in Richmond on Wednesday evening to honor the life of Dimarea Young, a 19-year-old man who was shot and killed on this block the day before. Friends and neighbors, pastors and politicians, police officers and violence disrupters stood side by side, heads bowed.

"We place him up," said Reverend Alvin Bernstein, who was leading the group in a prayer. "We pray for the mother. We lift them up."

A woman from the center of the crowd started to weep.

"We are going to change this city in a real way."

Her sobs escalated to screams.

"Enough is enough."

Bernstein closed the prayer, and the group echoed his "Amen."

The woman collapsed. Still screaming, she was carried out of the prayer vigil.

The gathering was a small gesture in the face of a disturbing and familiar violence. Dewanda Joseph, who lives two blocks down the street, prayed on this same street corner the night before, hours after Young was shot to death. When she woke up Wednesday morning, she started making phone calls, posting messages on Facebook and spreading the word that another vigil would be held that night. Joseph said she doesn't have the answer to senseless tragedies like Young's killing. But community gatherings might be a start.

"When I came out and prayed Tuesday, it made a difference," Joseph said. "I could sleep last night."

The event comforted some. But on the streets, gang tensions remain hot. The Richmond Police Department has dispatched extra patrols with an "all hands on deck effort" after the string of shootings last week left six people wounded and one dead, said Detective Nicole Abetkov. The Office of Neighborhood Safety is also working to defuse tensions on the street, said Director DeVone Boggan, noting that these conflicts are nothing out of the ordinary.



Flier for Dimarea Young's vigil sits on his gravestone

"Every day my staff is engaging somebody that wants to shoot" someone, Boggan said. "This definitely is the exposure and demonstration of tensions, but there are tensions every day."

On Saturday, three men were shot in front of Uncle Sam's Liquor on Cutting Blvd, a location that has seen multiple shootings over the past years, Abetkov said. The next day, Jamar Oliver, a 33-year-old man from Sacramento, was shot while standing in front of his grandmother's house. Young was killed two days later.

The week's rampage comes as Richmond is still recovering from other violent high-profile cases. San Pablo resident Raymond Harris, 34, was shot and killed at the top of the stairs exiting the Richmond BART station on March 14. Soon after Harris died, gunfire ripped

through the walls of a home in the Iron Triangle, wounding a one-year-old baby who was in his grandmother's arms.

Although the violence seems to have come in waves, Police Department records suggest the overall level is no higher than usual in Richmond for this time of year. As of April 10, Richmond has seen 34 shootings in 2013, compared to 31 in 2012 and 35 in 2011. At this time last year, Richmond had counted seven homicides. This year's count is up to four, including the shooting at the BART station. But the average numbers don't reflect a real fear in Richmond residents right now.

"I don't like statistics in the face of what is such an emotionally poignant and vivid event like last night," Richmond Police Captain Mark Gagan said after the vigil for Young.

Whispers of a shooting spree that residents are calling March Madness have spread across the city. According to parents, teachers and after-school program administrators, students are talking about it — and that makes it real. Law enforcement officials don't give credit to the rumor, saying that shootings are no higher in March than at any other time of year. And now that it's April, some question when the shootings will subside.

"We were all on edge in March," said Molly Raynor, co-founder of RAW Talent and a friend of Young's. "I was hoping it would calm down and it was just worse."

Basketball coach Rob Collins, who has been working at Richmond High for 9 years, says that the youth are "very aware of what's going on in our community." And they react accordingly to survive, Collins said.

"I'm an emotional person. I cry in front of every team," Collins said. "Some of them, they're out of emotions."

The fear is so pervasive in Richmond that people are scared to come forward to police, said Tamisha Walker, a Richmond resident who works with the Safe Return Project to advocate for prisoners coming home.

"Without that element of trust for people to feel safe enough to engage with law enforcement about what they know, there's pretty much nothing you can do," she said.

The police are offering a \$25,000 reward for information leading to an arrest over a shooting, a reward usually reserved for homicides. But Detective Nicole Abetkov said the police are having such a hard time with witnesses coming forward with information about the recent shootings that a reward was set up.

"We're working against the grain with no one cooperating," Abetkov said.

Before, during and after the vigil Wednesday night, peacekeepers from the Office of Neighborhood Safety were walking the streets and talking to gang members they suspected were behind the homicide and the recent shootings, said ONS Director DeVone Boggan.



Deandre Evans and Donté Clark at the vigil for Dimarea Young

"There's a high pressure for retaliation right now," Boggan said. "Folks determined to shoot are not affected by the vigil."

The Richmond Police Department also increased its presence throughout Richmond, with officers sent out to gather information about gang activity, enforce a daytime curfew to get perpetrators off the streets during school hours and patrol "hot spots" where violence is predicted to occur, according to a

statement released by Police Chief Chris Magnus. Thirteen people have been arrested in the last seven days, most for possession of firearms, others for gang conspiracy and gang-related drug offenses.

“What are we doing right now? Simply put—everything we can with the resources we have,” Magnus said in a written statement.

In the statement, Magnus said that violence is significantly lowered when “key gang members are taken off the streets.” Arrests, however, are not a permanent solution, Magnus continued. As soon as they come home from jail or prison, most pick up their old ways.

“The other reality is that even when gang leaders or ‘shot callers’ are successfully prosecuted, there are many younger folks—some as young as 14 or 15—ready to take their place and become involved in committing serious acts of violence,” Magnus said in the statement.



Candles and a photo of Dimarea and his girlfriend sit at the spot where Dimarea was gunned down.

Gagan would not comment on whether incarcerated gang members coming home or younger members stepping up played a role in Young’s homicide. But he did say that based on the timing and location of the shooting, Young was a target. This shooting was not random. Gagan also said that gang alliances are shifting, leading to infighting between formerly aligned gangs, and that the resulting violence is unpredictable.

“Gang violence is very fluid and evolves and changes, sometimes for very pronounced and obvious reasons,” Gagan said. Other times, the root behind the violence is less clear, and can be anything from a fender bender, disrespect or a girl.

Boggan said that ONS is seeing dynamics between gangs in Richmond right now as “something very different.” Where rivalries typically crossed a border between North and Central Richmond, now gang tensions are flaring up between Central and South Richmond. North Richmond is also seeing internal fighting, Boggan said, mostly related to an uptick in robberies.

“There are young men in Richmond everyday that are negotiating conflicts that could lead to gun violence,” Boggan said.

Boggan said he wants to see those who are guilty “pay the full price that the law will allow.” But cases go unsolved, with the police department clearing about 44 percent of 410 homicides over the last decade. The reality is that shooters can sometimes get away with heinous crimes, Boggan said. And they know it.

“If they don’t pay the full price, if they somehow avoid standing criminal consequences, then obviously it’s our job to wrap our arms around the young men, to change the lifestyle and mindsets,” Boggan said.

Residents and law enforcement alike have embraced the idea that if an arrest and conviction isn’t possible, preventing further violence is the next-best option. Groups like Walker’s Safe Return Project and leaders throughout Richmond are advocating for more programs that will support people coming home from jail and help people develop skills to find jobs. On the day of his death, Young was participating in a vocational course to learn construction skills, embodying this very concept.

“The fact that our latest victim was participating in a job training program is unfortunate because that is the solution for people to get out of this lifestyle,” Gagan said.

In the minutes before his murder on Tuesday morning, Young was taking a jog with his father, brother and the RichmondBUILD class when the shooter pulled up in a white vehicle and opened fire in broad daylight. By the time police arrived to the scene, Young was dead. Two other victims were injured by the gunshots.

At the vigil in his honor, friends described Young as hilarious and talented. An MC, Young helped start the RAW Talent group and he also helped design its logo.

“He was very loved,” said Jessica Wright-Davis, director of the Making Waves education program, who had known Young since he was in middle school.

He was a high school graduate. But friends said he had felt the pull toward the streets and gangs. He stopped participating in RAW Talent. It was only recently that he started to get his life back together, enrolling in the vocational course.

“I’m just devastated,” Wright-Davis said.

Although he was there when his son was gunned down, Kitric Young stood before the crowd at the vigil to speak in the name of peace.

“The father was in a unique position to ask for no retaliation of future violence in the face of having lost his son,” Gagan said.

Joseph said that she took away a message of love from Young’s talk.

“As a parent, I can’t even imagine the loss he is feeling,” Joseph said. “He said, ‘love is an action word.’ He says he’s hearing people say things. But it’s not what you say, it’s what you do.”

<http://richmondconfidential.org/2013/04/12/richmond-mourns-another-while-gang-tensions-remain-hot/>



Questions for Discussion and Research

1. When the Chevron refinery explosion occurred on August 6, 2012, Richmond residents were warned to go inside and stay inside their homes. However, there was a [delay of more than an hour](#) until they were told to “shelter-in-place” by way of automated phone calls from emergency services. Go the site [Asthma Contra Costa - California Breathing](#) and study the data presented for *Asthma Emergency Department Visits, 2014*; *Asthma Hospitalizations, 2012*; *Asthma Disparities*; *Healthy People 2010*; and *Hospitalization Rates Over Time*.

What does the data tell you about the people most likely to be afflicted with asthma in Contra Costa County? Can you make a correlation between economic levels and incidence of asthma? Why or why not?

Look on the web for comparable information from your county or community. Discuss the data from Asthma Contra Costa - California Breathing and what you found on where you live. Discuss how demographics come into play for this particular health problem.

2. Toward the end of *Romeo Is Bleeding*, we learn how many friends and relatives Donté has lost within the last couple of years:

- Ervin “Lil’ Erv” Coley III (1990–2011)
- William “Kass” Wheeler (1986–2013)
- Nelson Earl Hamilton III (1990–2013)
- Lavonta “Macho” Crummie (1990–2013)
- Dimarea Young (1993–2013)

Dimarea died during the filming of *Romeo Is Bleeding*, and he’s seen in photos taken at RAW Talent. Donté’s cousin “Macho” was interviewed as he hung out on the street with Donté. When Donté asked Macho what he’d like people who see the movie to know about North Richmond, Macho replied quietly and seriously, “There’s a lot of talent out here.”

Read the newspaper accounts of the shootings of “Lil’ Erv” Coley: “[North Richmond man slain, neighborhood on edge](#),” Dimarea Young: “[Richmond: Man killed in daytime shooting in front of vocational class](#),” and “Macho” Crummie: “[North Richmond bids farewell to slain ‘Project prince’](#).” Reread the “[North Richmond: Most killings go unsolved in tiny enclave](#)” and study the crime statistics presented.

In a small group or as a classroom exercise, discuss the following: What does the tone of each of these articles communicate to the reader? Are there similarities in the ways these young men are described in the first three articles, and if so, what are they? If there are strong differences in tone and approach, what are these differences? Search for other articles either in newspapers or periodicals that relate to shooting deaths in North Richmond and compare these to the first three articles.

How does the fourth article express information about the young men who were killed? The article provides an overview of the violent situation in North Richmond, so it is not intended to focus on any one young man. But what tone does this article take when discussing some of the men who have been killed?

Now read “[Point Richmond: Girlfriend arrested in stabbing death of 36-year-old man](#).” What is the tone of this article? Discuss the similarities and the differences you find in this article when compared to the first three articles, especially having to do with the people quoted in each article and what they say.

Although a fully informed discussion would require much more extensive and deeper research, use this exercise as a starting point for a discussion about race, economic status, crime, law enforcement, journalism, and public perceptions about and reactions to violent crime.