

# REPORTS FROM THE BATTLEFRONTS #2

## Calling all movement cadre to report in

## A national movement must know itself

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### **Another Africana Studies Department being dismantled: Students', Faculty, and Community fight back by Prof. Tony Vandermeer**

The Africana Studies Department at the University of Massachusetts Boston, a publicly funded university has been under the cutting knife by university bureaucrats. This has become a growing trend at Universities throughout the country. The Boston case emerged from the denial of Tenure to two Black Female professors by the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts. The two female professor were recommended by the personnel committee of the Africana Studies Department. The Chair of the Africana Studies Department and faculty members responded by appealing to the Dean, Provost, and Chancellor but were rebuffed.

The response of the Dean was to use a negative AQUAD (Academic Quality Assessment and Development) Review to justify removing the Chair of the Africana Studies Department and placing it in receivership. Despite the Dean's intent to blame the Chair, disrupt the department, and taint the reputations of faculty members in the department – the Africana Studies Department was acknowledged by the AQUAD review team as having a strong impact on students:

*The strongest and most positive impression made on us during our visit came from the Umass Boston students who were gathered to discuss their views of the department. The students were articulate, intelligent, and ardent in their commitment of the Africana Studies department and, more broadly, to the field as a mode of inquiry that speaks deeply to who they are and what they want for themselves and thier world. They told stories about departmental offerings that deepened thier commitment to academic pursuits and opened their eyes to different ways of thinking about the world and themselves, and they articulated the desire that the department Studies have what it*

*needs to become an exemplary academic program.... The students were deeply impressive; their stories poignant."*

The AQUAD review team also pointed out the 'administration failure' in supporting the Africana Studies Department stating, *"But we also note the administration's failure to support the development and growth of the program [Department] and its faculty beyond the department's center's earlier contributions."*

The replacement Chair of the Africana Studies Department appointed by the Dean has been a disaster. There were no proper department meeting since the fall of 2016, and no consultation with faculty in assigning courses. A hostile environment has been created in the department with the appointed chair towards the staff, faculty and students.

### **Faculty Staff Union Remains Silent**

The Union that serves the faculty has been silent and had refuse to support and be present at the grievances filed by members of the Africana Studies Department. Members of the Africana Studies Department sent in a request to be on the agenda of the Executive Committee of the union, but were rebuffed when they attended. The union leadership has focused more on contractual technicalities and not addressing nor confronting the impact of institutionalize racism experienced by faculty of color. The union have taken up the issue of the universities fiscal crisis, yet, have not connected the impact of the fiscal crisis on faculty, staff, students of color and the community it serves. The vice president of the union has made a public statement in support of the universities decision to marginalize the African Studies Department and supporting his friend from the English Department who does not have the leadership experience need to chair a department. Without any investigation, or speaking with members of the Africana Studies Department, the union vice president stated:

*But a few things I do know. One is that as far as we have been able to tell, the receivership of the department has been handle according to the rules. It has all been above water. But the most important issue for me is that people who object what has happened with that department are saying things that are simply not true, and indeed seem slanderous to me, about my friend and colleague (the appointed Chair).*

These comments came out of the mouth of a union vice president supporting the decisions of management and his "friend" who was also on the AQUAD Review committee, a clear conflict of interest.

### **Fiscal Crisis**

The University of Massachusetts Boston is experiencing a fiscal crisis. It is constructing new buildings that are needed, building its first dorm and currently are \$30 million in debt. Unfortunately the state legislature contributes only 17% to its budget (in past years they contributed 70%). The African American Chancellor of the University of Massachusetts Boston

is being scapegoated for the budget deficit when the Board of Trustees and the President of all the UMass schools were aware of the pending fiscal crisis. The President has hired a \$250,000 Deputy Chancellor to share responsibility with the Chancellor. This decision by the president has created a media barnstorm by the Boston Globe newspaper and an environment of uncertainty on the campus.

### **Campus Community Forums**

The Africana faculty and students have organized several packed campus community forums demanding that a new committee be developed to reevaluate the two Black female professors denied tenure. Additional demands included the removal of the appointed Chair and the receivership status of the Africana Studies Department. This spring a panel was organized of University faculty, current and past elected officials, community activist then alumni to hear from students, faculty, staff, and community member's support of the Africana Studies Department. The Dean and Provost attended that meeting and an impromptu discussion occurred that lasted four hour questioning the Dean and Provost about their decisions in dismantling the Africana Studies Department. Faculty, students, staff, and community activist demanded that as a public university the university include them in the governance of the Department and other committee that are involved in making decisions about the Department. The greater Boston community has a majority of people of color, yet it is plagued with high poverty rates, poor schools, high rents and gentrification.

As a result of the growing student movement on campus the media spotlight the Africana Studies Department faculty, staff, student and community representatives are currently engaged in discussions with the Provost, Dean, and the appointed chair in how to move forward. Among many demands the Department is insisting on the removal of the appointed chair; the removal of receivership and restoring governance to the faculty, students, and community; restoring of the four and a half teaching lines to the department; make the administrative assistant position full-time instead of part-time; support and provide the resources to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Africana Studies Department; and, provide anti-racism training to the Dean's and Provost office.

## **"April 4 and the build up to May Day, May 1, International Workers Day this year" by Angaza Laughinghouse**

Black Workers For Justice, Hip Hop For Justice Youth and & NC Public Service Workers have been working with others to build united front coalitions for mobilizing around the NC police brutality/repression /Movement for Black Lives motion, as well as linking up with the Fight for \$15 folks to pull together actions all across our State this coming Tuesday, April 4.

There are some really powerful political targets, messages and demands that the year old the Triangle Unity May Day coalition and People's Assembly folks are working to pull together into a unifying mass action on May Day in the Triangle this year.

APRIL 4 -:

RSVP for Durham: <https://www.facebook.com/events/507366422984597/>

RSVP for Gastonia: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1271005089634401/>

RSVP for Greenville: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1510625029008120/>

### **BUILDING FOR MAY DAY 2017, INTERNATIONAL WORKERS DAY!**

Coming out of the last Triangle, NC - People's Assembly on March 19, it was resolved to build for mass action on May Day and to support multitudes of actions all across the state -- including student walk-outs, worker speak-outs/rallies at work places, teacher walk-in's before school day, workers calling off sick from work, NO WORK, NO SHOPPING and NO SCHOOL!

However, we also are working on serving as a hub for coordinating actions, share resources, distribute materials and particularly to build for a few larger unified actions throughout the day including:

- 1) EARLY AFTERNOON: Raleigh, Large march/rally in rally, potentially at the Wake Detention Center, and/or State Legislature.
- 2) MID AFTERNOON: Safe space at a mosque or Islamic Center that serves as a teach-in around Islamophobia, and place people can gather, have childcare, eat food.
- 3) EVENING, Durham: Mass action, rally and/or march downtown that fills up City Hall during City Council meeting that night.

Folks are working on getting meetings together this week to plan all of these and more. If you are planning an action on May Day, please report it back to [trianglepeoplesassembly@gmail.com](mailto:trianglepeoplesassembly@gmail.com)

If you are interested in helping to plan May Day actions, please respond to this email .

## **The East Cleveland Recall by Devin Branch**

On December 6th 2016, the people of East Cleveland went to the polls and ousted Mayor Gary Norton and City Council President Thomas Wheeler. This development, though grossly underreported on in the regional press, and practically never mentioned outside of northeast Ohio, has significance for activists and organizers struggling at the grassroots level to counter the betrayals of the Black working class by the negro lackeys of the white establishment.

The recall was organized by a handful of well organized and committed activists, primarily as a response to the efforts of Mayor Norton and Council President Wheeler to pursue the annexation of East Cleveland by the City of Cleveland; an annexation he stated was necessary to prevent a total collapse in city services as a consequence of the fiscal challenges confronting the city.

Those of us who lead the recall movement saw annexation for what it really was; a frontal assault on black self-determination and the political influence of the Black working class. We were determined not only to resist this assault, but to launch a counter-offensive against its advocates.

The City of East Cleveland is a 3.2 sq. mile, 95% Black suburb of the city of Cleveland, with a population of 17,843 residents, and a median household income of \$20,660. It is the *blackest* city in the State of Ohio, and decidedly working class.

For years the people of East Cleveland had been let down and betrayed by its political leaders. However, as has been the case in most black communities across this country, those who have sold us out have suffered no consequences.

The recall election, though initiated to stop the annexation, was truly about delivering consequences. It was a popular revolt against decades of corruption, neglect, and betrayal. It was about sending the message to the establishment that not only do those who sell us out have to worry about us taking to the streets, they also have to worry about us taking to the ballot box and taking them out.

When the recall campaign began, those of us who were organizing it were mocked by the administration, and by some in the media establishment. There had never been a successful recall election in the history of the City of East Cleveland, and no recall petition against a mayor had ever even gathered enough signatures to make it to the ballot.

However, through a grassroots movement that mobilized dozens of volunteers, we were able, not only to put the mayor and the council president on the ballot, we were able to defeat them on election day. And we were able to do so with little more than \$1,000.00 cash.

Our victory was a clear demonstration of the capacity of the black working class to rise up against the establishment and win.