

# The Uhuru Movement Works for Black People, Not Russia!

## The U.S. Government Lied and Lost!

# The Uhuru Movement Told the Truth and Won!



My name is Ona Zené Yeshitela, Board President of the nonprofit African People's Education & Defense Fund (APEDF) and leader of the economic development work of the Uhuru "Freedom" Movement.

I stand with Chairman Omali Yeshitela, Penny Hess and Jesse Nevel, known as the "Uhuru 3", in their recent legal victory that concluded:

**The Uhuru Movement Works for Black People, Not Russia!  
The U.S. Government Lied and Lost! The Uhuru Movement Told the Truth and Won!**

On September 12, 2024, a federal jury found the Uhuru 3 NOT GUILTY of acting as agents under the direction and control of the Russian government. The Uhuru Movement has won a historic victory against this political attack on free speech. The U.S. government's attack was directed at our work to independently create economic development for our African/Black community, our criticism of our conditions of existence and disagreement with U.S. foreign policy.

Despite a wrongful conviction on a lesser charge, which the Uhuru 3 lawyers intend to appeal, the essence of the jury's verdict finding Chairman Omali, Penny and Jesse NOT GUILTY of being Russian agents sent a message loud and clear: Our movement was really attacked because we work for the Black community!



APEDF trained 14 African women to be doulas to combat the plague of Black maternal and infant mortality.

Historically, the U.S. government has used the charge of acting as Russian agents against our community and Black leaders such as Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson and others.

At 5 a.m. on July 29, 2022, the FBI conducted violent, military-style raids at four of our St. Louis, MO homes and offices. It is suspected that the city of St. Louis spent tens or possibly hundreds of thousands of taxpayers' dollars to collaborate with the FBI in conducting these raids. Additionally, it took the Department of Justice nine months after the raid before indicting the Uhuru 3, effectively curtailing our ability to work on behalf of the Black community.

**When the U.S. government put the Uhuru 3 on trial on September 3, 2024 in Tampa, FL, the government's 14 witnesses (12 paid FBI employees and two paid "experts") admitted they had absolutely NO EVIDENCE of the charges they**



Our community came out to support the Uhuru 3 and packed the courtroom every day of the trial.

**had levied against the Uhuru 3. Moreover, the FBI's lead investigator admitted on the stand that the FBI had lied about the charges. And the prosecution could not produce a single witness to testify to any illegal activity by the Uhuru 3. The charges brought against the Uhuru 3 were based on the political stance of the Uhuru Movement, which should be constitutionally-protected free speech.**



The Gary Brooks Community Garden uplifted the look of our whole neighborhood that is contaminated by abandoned buildings and vacant lots.

**Chairman Omali Yeshitela summed up the verdict by stating, "the most important thing is that they were unable to convict us for working for anybody except Black people. They had to say we were not working for the Russians."**

No member of the African People's Education & Defense Fund was on trial or indicted. However, the political attack on the Uhuru Movement has been used against APEDF in an attempt to stop our community development work in St. Louis.

The Uhuru Movement is comprised of a number of groups and organizations that share a united philosophy of being part of a forcibly dispersed African nation. We are actively engaged in economic, political and social anti-colonial self-determination work.

Personally, I have been on the ground in North St. Louis for ten years since the murder of Michael Brown in 2014. I live and work in this community. Despite the slander constantly directed at North St. Louis, I am proud to say that the northside is a good community that has defied every effort by powerful economic and political interests to depopulate and deprive it of the capacity for self-determination.

APEDF always has and always will work for Black people. We are a grassroots nonprofit, defending the civil and human rights of our community and creating programs and institutions that address the grave disparities we face. We are a necessary response to the

conditions of colonialism that Black communities have faced for over 600 years.

The city of St. Louis and its agencies have tried every tactic to prevent APEDF from moving forward our positive community programs, meant to address the serious inequalities we face in North St. Louis. The latest attack is an attempt to keep a bakery and cafe from opening on West Florissant Avenue despite the area being a blighted "food desert" and the project having overwhelming community support.

We can no longer be silent about the ongoing slander and attacks on our organization and this community. It's time to set the record straight.

**APEDF stands in firm support of the Black community of North St. Louis. The conditions here on the northside are not due to shortcomings by the community. Our labor and resources have historically produced wealth for others at our expense, which keeps our neighborhoods resource-starved.**

Black life expectancy in North St. Louis is 17 years less than in the white community. We lose enough African babies from infant mortality in St. Louis to fill 12 kindergarten classrooms every year. APEDF successfully trained 14 African women in our African Doula Project, addressing disparities in health and healthcare. It is our plan to open up the Uhuru wa Kulea ("Freedom to Nurture" in Swahili) Women's Health Center in 2025/2026.

Black people make up 13% of the national population but 40% of the prison population.



We built and opened the Black Power Vanguard Basketball Court, which is free for the community 7 days a week!

This devastates and destabilizes our entire community. This is why we have initiated our African Independence Workforce Program, to support community members returning from the prison system.

**Our community lives in derelict housing, with the highest rates of unemployment, underemployment and poverty. We live in an area of food apartheid, with limited access to**

**fresh food. This is why we created the One Africa! One Nation! Farmers Market and Gary Brooks Community Garden.**

**It's a disgrace that the city allows these conditions to exist when they have the power to change them. In 2021, St. Louis received nearly \$500 million in funding from the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA or COVID-19 funds). The city received this money because of the impact COVID-19 had on the St. Louis Black community, including Black small businesses.**

APEDF and scores of struggling small businesses in North St. Louis face red tape, fees and fines at every turn. We want beautiful, vibrant neighborhoods, but we are blocked and challenged at every step.

Since 2014, the Uhuru Movement has raised over \$1 million through community donations to invest in Black communities in St. Louis. Our work has been one of the ONLY impactful sources of community upliftment, revitalization and empowerment in North St. Louis. In a very short period of time APEDF has been able to do what no city official, city entity and too few alderpersons have been willing to do: build grassroots economic empowerment that changes conditions for Black people.



Chairman Omali Yeshitela speaking at the Grand Opening of the Black Power Vanguard Community Basketball Court

**The city of St. Louis had no problem finding the resources to attack a movement that has transformed a long-neglected neighborhood. They colluded in the violent FBI raids on the movement that created a community garden, farmers market, community center, event space, housing units and more. Meanwhile residents who experience the violence of living in imposed poverty have to fight and plead for resources that were designated for community use years ago.**

Our organization has been slandered and blocked by agencies and public officials. In 2022-23, banking institutions such as Regions and Chase closed the accounts for our nonprofit and social enterprises with no explanation. They forced us to pay off a mortgage years before it was due. They were intent on bankrupting us, even though we have stellar credit ratings and pay our bills early.

In 2023, the Land Reutilization Authority (LRA) attempted to take properties away from APEDF. When we waged a legal and media battle, we won back the properties for which we had met all requirements and had been approved to purchase. The St. Louis Development Corporation (SLDC) and the city stated it was a "clerical error" that was responsible for their attempt to take back the properties already granted to us. This is the same cover up the city is using for the North St. Louis business grants.

From 2017-2022, there are several more examples. Some former aldermen refused to support building permits and tried to extort money from our organization. One alderman called the police on our farmers market that is designed to end food apartheid. Another



We publicly take a stand to defend the rights of the Black community and build economic development to benefit our people.

alderman told us that we could not build a basketball court because Black children would shoot each other. That is slander! We built it anyway. We are proud to say it has muted contention in our community and community members testify to this.

Now, the Zoning Department and Board of Public Service are blocking APEDF from opening a bakery and cafe. They claim it will be detrimental to the neighborhood! This would be laughable if it was not such a blatant attack and if the city was not forcing us to waste thousands of dollars. Without this egregious roadblock, we would have a beautiful restaurant open for our people in North St. Louis right now.

**These attempts to destroy APEDF have failed because people throughout St. Louis want to see an end to the "Delmar Divide" and we are building the blueprint for how to revitalize an entire community.**

The people are demanding accountability from the Mayor and the city departments that are keeping our North St. Louis community impoverished and disempowered. This is evident in the recent struggles that are reported in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch regarding the SLDC's handling of the North St. Louis Small Business and Nonprofit grants.

Lance Knuckles, SLDC Director of Strategic Development & Growth, toured the Black Power Blueprint projects in 2022 and told APEDF not to apply for this grant because our project was too ambitious. Now others are set to receive more money than we

were planning to request, including family members of aldermen and businesses that are not open. Many other Black businesses were falsely told that they had not submitted proper applications. The application process was burdensome and not transparent.

**In 2021, the U.S. Department of Treasury gave the City of St. Louis nearly \$500 million in ARPA funds. The amount allocated to SLDC for the North St. Louis Small Business and Nonprofit grants was \$37 million. That is only 7% of the money the city has received! Why are our northside businesses not receiving what we need?**



We hold programs with the people, meet with community partners and rent out Akwaaba Hall at the Uhuru House.

**Rent Akwaaba Hall  
314- 380-8016**

**The attacks backed by and carried out by city officials against our organization and our community must stop!**

**We salute and stand with those courageous members of our community who continue to fight for our neighborhoods. We cannot be afraid to stand up. The future of our children and community is at stake!**

**UHURU!**

*- Ona Zené Yeshitela, Board President, African People's Education & Defense Fund, Architect Black Power Blueprint*

### We Demand:

1. The immediate approval of the Uhuru Bakery & Cafe conditional use permit.
2. Stop the slander and criminalization of APEDF and our community immediately!
3. A public apology for the role the city played in the violent FBI raids on July 29, 2022.
4. The SLDC recognize the work of APEDF in this community as promised to us in 2022.
5. \$778 million dollars (the ARPA funds plus the settlement from the Rams) designated for our community must immediately be released for use to organizations and small businesses on the northside!
6. The immediate disclosure of all money distributed by the city for economic development and a federal audit of the city of St. Louis to restore community trust in the city as a custodian for the resources of the people!
7. Accountability and transparency:
  - a. All city offices and officials must hold office hours during regular business hours each weekday to serve the citizens of St. Louis.
  - b. All city meetings must be held in-person, rather than online meetings, during which the city cannot be held accountable.
  - c. The Board of Aldermen meetings must be open to public comments.
  - d. Transparency from the city entities who serve as gatekeepers of the resources we need to transform the conditions in our neighborhoods! This includes the Mayor, the Board of Aldermen, the SLDC, the Community Development Administration (CDA), the Board of Public Service, the Zoning Department and the Building Department.

**Hear What Our Community Has to Say...**



"[This] used to be a major thoroughfare for people that look like us, it was booming with a lot of stores and really safe...everybody [looked] out for everybody... Since Uhuru has been...in this neighborhood it has gone up and up...It's been a year since I've heard about a murder in this area and you all are... almost solely responsible for that."

- Ben Petty, aka Mr. Dependable



"I've lived in St. Louis my whole life...this is important to me because I want to help out the community and inspire everybody else to come together...I learned about our history and how we changed the world."

- Jaiven Calvin, Gary Brooks Black Power Community Garden Intern



"They address the needs of North St. Louis that aren't met by local government. As a white resident of a community built using stolen resources from Black people, I support their work by donating and volunteering as a stand of reparations."

- Brendan McCoy, African People's Solidarity Committee