

"We're doing a fundraiser so we can take folks to New York City to ... open their eyes to what's really going on"

A Challenge to Match Funds: From Ferguson & St. Louis to the Cornel West & Bob Avakian Dialogue



On Saturday, Nov. 8 a dozen mainly young volunteers organized a bake sale and raised \$401 to get people from Ferguson and St. Louis to NYC for the Cornel West-Bob Avakian Dialogue on Revolution & Religion. There was a lot of determination and camaraderie fueling this event, and **we are not finished yet! We are calling on YOU to contribute and go to others to raise matching funds right now.**

A young woman volunteer said: "We're doing a fundraiser so we can take folks to New York City basically to educate the uneducated and have them open their eyes to what's really going on... we are low income... We need help... Doctors, dentists, gynecologists.... they have money to do that. What can you contribute to help us show others what we are seeing?"

The crew included people who have been the heart of the Stop Mass Incarceration Network chapter and helped organize October 22nd actions; people who have been in the frontlines of the battle for justice for Mike Brown in Ferguson; a whole family including 2 teens; as well as people that only heard about the bake sale fundraiser the day before, one of whom spent all day Friday baking to make this a success.



The bake sale at Tower Grove Park on the southside of St. Louis was a high energy, magnetic and boisterous scene! It started out looking a little iffy. As 9am rolled around, it was cold, grey, and windy with sparse traffic. But tenaciousness and infectious energy of the volunteers, later the sun breaking out from behind the clouds, saved the day.

Two tables with baked goods and signs were set up at a busy intersection. An organizer in an orange jumpsuit weaved in and out of traffic distributing palm cards and collecting funds. Volunteers blew whistles and addressed passing cars and pedestrians on a bullhorn. "Homemade cookies, sweet potato pies and red velvet cake!" "Support people from Ferguson and St. Louis to be in the house for the Cornel West-Bob Avakian dialogue on revolution and religion!" "Support Ferguson!" A young volunteer on the bullhorn challenged people to stand up to modern day slavery and institutionalized racism, while welcoming people and thanking them for donating. She also agitated that the youth in the streets need an intellectual dimension for the fight.

This event was pulled off in 3 days. It took determination, serious organization, and an appreciation that we could win support from people that didn't yet have a clue about the West-Avakian Dialogue. The first plan for a fish fry and BBQ crashed when we ran up against the notorious St. Louis's north county codes that outlaw just about everything. We tried to get a table at a race to raise funds for the homeless happening that morning in Tower Grove Park. This ultimately didn't work out but this represented the spirit of reaching out to everyone that needs to know about the dialogue and could be supportive. We approached a popular café that is a center of the LGBT and wider progressive community in St. Louis. The owner offered crucial support including providing coffee and tables, as well as encouragement and ideas, to make the bake sale a big success. Volunteers took photos on the spot and tweeted them out to spread the word and drum up support.

The response from passers by was very positive. Tower Grove Park is near the site of the police murder of Vonderrit Myers which occurred only a month ago. This sparked nightly protest marches and drew in activists from Ferguson and drew out neighborhood residents, both Black and white. Bake sale support came from a diverse range of people, including people going to a nearby salon and others waiting for the bus, couples pushing strollers, students and seniors, regulars at the nearby café, a group visiting St. Louis who are part of a Kentucky Stop Mass Incarceration Network chapter, and a teacher from the HS that Mike Brown attended. Some knew of Cornel West, but few knew about the Nov. 15 dialogue before we met them.

Here is what some of the bake sale volunteers had to say:

"I think there is a lot of value in... talking about an issue such as this [revolution & religion]. It's a particularly interesting concept ... with religion having issues of being dogmatic, but also trying to consolidate on how to be religious and not abide systems of oppression when trying to battle systems of oppression on a grand scale. And anything supporting Ferguson."

"Raising money to help the youth go to NY and be part of this very important movement and as a mother from St Louis I can contribute by baking and helping them raise some funds to do that, that's why I'm here."

"I am out here in support for [Stop] Mass Incarceration because I truly do believe in supporting a cause that wants to stop mass incarceration and the brutalization of all people. Right now the majority is the minority race so I'm here because I support the movement of love and peace for all people and support our bake sale. Thanks"

A volunteer who was barely a kid growing up in St. Louis projects in the 1960s, and who has been a stalwart in the Mike Brown protests, said he was here to represent for the youth. He emphasized that people like him had to take responsibility because we didn't finish the job in the 60's and that youth today "got the energy, but need the knowledge."

"I'm here supporting the Revolution and Religion seminar with Cornel West and Bob Avakian. We're also here supporting the Mike Brown case. We're raising money to go to New York and hear this seminar... We would love it if someone would match our \$400. That would be great. ... I'm going to go to NY to get my mind blown, and ya'll need to get your mind blown too."

