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WINTER 2008

## New Sponsored Project: VAMOS Unidos Organizes Bronx Street Vendors

VAMOS Unidos became the Muste Institute's newest sponsored project in mid-October 2007. This article was written by VAMOS Unidos organizer Rafael Samanez.

VAMOS Unidos – Vendedores Ambulantes Mobilizando y Organizando en Solidaridad (Street Vendors Mobilizing and Organizing in Solidarity) is a new, Bronx community-based social justice organization founded by low-income Latin American immigrant street vendors.

Our rapidly growing membership comes from many countries including Mexico, Ecuador, Peru, and Puerto Rico. Many have migrated to the United States in the past ten years as a direct result of international policies like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) which have severely crippled their local economies, particularly in agriculture and small business. At the same time, immigration laws here in the U.S. have forced migrants into an underground and invisible workforce where they have no protections as workers. Members of our community are often forced to work in sweatshops or do domestic work. They endure abuse because they are threatened with deportation, which means separation from their families. Our community is forced to be the backbone of service industries that dominate the local and global economy.

Street vending provides an alternative, allowing workers to increase their income and giving them flexibility with their schedules so they can care for and be present with their families. Many vendors are single mothers who would otherwise would have no source of income.

Corporations and business interests consider vendors to be a threat to the existing system. Local and federal laws protect these interests and undermine informal workers, making street vending one of the most marginalized sectors within New York City's economy. Street vendors work with fear of being arrested, having their merchandise confiscated, or receiving a summons. One of our members, Juan, was arrested with his wife for selling without a license. Juan and his wife repeatedly told the police officers that they had children coming home from school and needed to make a phone call to set up childcare. The officers told them they had no rights in this country as immigrant workers and did not allow them to make a phone call. Arrested at 6pm, they were not released until 9pm the following day. Their children remained home, scared and not knowing why their parents did not come home.

## Dear Friends,

Your contributions to the A.J. Muste Memorial Institute are counted as "charitable gifts" by the IRS, but to the projects we support, they are much more than that. They are real, tangible demonstrations of solidarity.

We believe in the power of our grantees and sponsored projects to build a better future through grassroots organizing, education and activism. Your contributions are investments in that future.

Please help us do more. Increase the amount of your donation. Tell a friend about the Muste Institute. Share this newsletter with co-workers. Pass along our web address to your email lists.

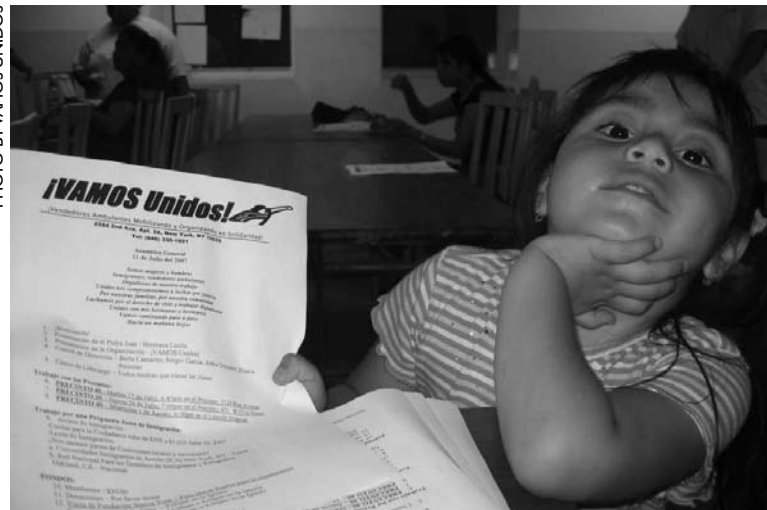
On behalf of the Muste Institute and all our grantees, sponsored projects and tenant groups, we thank you for your solidarity.

Murray Rosenblith  
Executive Director

VAMOS Unidos began organizing and has managed to stop arrests in three precincts by meeting with community affairs officers, sergeants and captains, and community councils to publicly hold them accountable. Street vendors report a noticeable decrease in abusive treatment by police once they begin engaging them at meetings.

Together with the Brooklyn-based Latin American Workers' Project, VAMOS Unidos is organizing to build a strong street vendor coalition to lift the caps set over 20 years ago on food cart permits and general merchandise  
*continued on page 2*

PHOTO BY VAMOS UNIDOS



Children of street vendors always accompany their parents at meetings, forming a strong multi-generational organization.

## A.J. Muste and J. Edgar Hoover

*This article was written for Muste Notes by Tyler Whitmire, a student at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island.*

In her biography of A.J. Muste, *Abraham Went Out*, Jo Ann O. Robinson observes that Muste was “trusted by many people who did not share his politics,” and aided by many people who “hated Musteism and loved Muste.”

As part of my work on a senior thesis in history, I recently combed through the thousands of pages of A.J.’s FBI files which the Muste Institute obtained under the Freedom of Information Act.

In early 1957 FBI director J. Edgar Hoover made a public statement about Muste’s attendance as an invited, impartial observer at a Communist Party convention. A.J. Muste has “long fronted for Communists,” Hoover said, adding that “Muste’s report on the convention was as biased as could be expected.”

Hoover’s comments spurred a barrage of letters in support of A.J., leaving the FBI tied up with myriad “Inter-Office

Memorandums” on how to deal with these irate Muste defenders. In the end the FBI’s strategy was to conduct extensive background checks on each writer and obey the “NO ACK” (no acknowledgments) mandate which Hoover scrawled at the bottom of each letter.

Muste’s supporters, many of whose names were blacked out in the files, ranged from a septuagenarian former YWCA staffer in Kentucky named Mary Dingman, described during her background check as a general “do-gooder,” to the famous theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, to a high ranking member of the Methodist Church, to a Christian vocation professor at Yale Divinity School. Almost every letter came from individuals who loved Muste and trusted his integrity, yet often disagreed with his most basic beliefs. Niebuhr, whose support of ‘just war’ clashed with Muste’s strict pacifism, described himself in his letter as “a person who has long challenged what I regard as Muste’s rather simple-minded pacifism.” Still, Niebuhr

called Hoover’s claims about Muste “a grave error, to charge any patently honest pacifist... with Communist leanings, when everything that they write and do proves the contrary.”

Another example of the respect Muste enjoyed can be found in a September 1956 file. The FBI wanted to spy on Muste, believing he might participate in a broader socialist coalition being set up by the Communist Party. After weeks of trying to find someone close to Muste to spy on him, the disheartened Bureau finally admitted: “This file review failed to reflect the identity of any person who could be approached with security or who might be willing to assist the Bureau.”

To me, the FBI files highlight the greatness of A.J. Muste’s life work. A.J.’s colleagues cite his almost superhuman work ethic, his intelligence, and his steely passion as reasons for his success. But no quality of his seems to stand out more than his simple but unique ability to retain lifelong friendships with, and engender feelings of loyalty among, such a diverse array of individuals.

—Tyler Whitmire

## VAMOS (continued)

licenses in New York City. This would allow street vendors to sell with dignity and without fear of being arrested.

PHOTOS BY VAMOS UNIDOS



Members of VAMOS Unidos march in the Bronx to protest deportations and the separation of their families.

Our members understand that workers’ rights and immigrant rights go hand in hand. That’s why VAMOS Unidos is an active part of coalitions like the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (NNIRR) and here in New York, Immigrant Communities in Action (ICA), working to create grassroots-led, progressive agendas to win full legalization, prevent a new “guest-worker” program and reject enforcement, policing, and militarization of immigrant communities.

VAMOS Unidos seeks to be a part of the broader social justice movement as we develop a strong, empowered base and leadership of low-income Latin American immigrant workers who are politically conscious, economically self sufficient, and able to win change on local and national policies. Our vision is grounded



A member reads the VAMOS Unidos opening creed at a meeting, giving strength and direction to the group’s work.

in the importance of understanding the root causes and connection of our struggles with those in other communities.

—Rafael Samanez

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339 Lafayette Street, New York, NY 10012  
phone (212) 533-4335 fax (212) 228-6193  
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## New Grants, September 2007

### **CAMPAIGN TO END THE DEATH PENALTY, OAKLAND CHAPTER**

San Leandro, CA: \$2,000

The Oakland Chapter of CEDP was formed in October 2006 by activists coming out of the 2005 mobilizations to save Stan "Tookie" Williams. California executed Williams in December 2005, but the state's anti-death penalty movement has gained strength, and a recent legal challenge to lethal injection has led to a de facto moratorium on executions. This grant goes to build networking among family members, friends and allies of prisoners at San Quentin. [www.nodeathpenalty.org](http://www.nodeathpenalty.org)

### **GUATEMALA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION/USA**

Washington, DC: \$2,000

GHRC/USA was founded in 1982, at the peak of a "scorched earth" campaign in which US-backed Guatemalan security forces massacred some 132,000 civilians, destroyed at least 440 Mayan villages and forced over a million Guatemalans to flee their homes. With violence again on the rise in Guatemala, GHRC/USA continues to document abuses and educate the public about the situation. This grant goes to expand the

### **NOVA Travel Grants, August 2007**

In its August cycle, the NOVA Travel Fund made 15 grants totaling nearly \$8,000 for more than 40 grassroots activists from Chile, Guatemala, Argentina, Panama, Canada, Cuba, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Mexico to participate in seven regional meetings in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Uruguay and El Salvador. There wasn't enough space in this issue of the newsletter to describe each grant, but we encourage you to read about them on our website, either in the online version of the newsletter or as part of the complete 2007 roster of NOVA Travel grants.

The NOVA Travel Fund helps grassroots activists from Latin American, Caribbean and indigenous North American organizations to participate in regional meetings. The next deadlines are December 1, 2007, and February 1, 2008. Guidelines are in Spanish on our website—see [www.ajmuste.org/novaintro.html](http://www.ajmuste.org/novaintro.html)



January 2007, San Francisco: Campaign to End the Death Penalty members rally in support of death row prisoner Kevin Cooper.

use of new tools for educational outreach and urgent action response. [www.ghrc-usa.org](http://www.ghrc-usa.org)

### **TEXAS JUVENILE JUSTICE DOCUMENTARY PROJECT**

Austin, TX: \$2,000

This grant goes for "Blind Spots: Real Life Inside Texas' Youth Prisons," a documentary film seeking to expose the conditions of confinement for youth

incarcerated in Texas' state-run juvenile prisons. After its release, expected in January 2009, the film and its interactive website will be made available as organizing tools for prisoner rights activists.

### **UNITE FOR DIGNITY**

Miami Lakes, FL: \$2,000

Unite for Dignity was born in 2002 out of the union organizing victories of nursing home workers in South Florida. The organization is now a major force among immigrant communities from Haiti, the English-speaking Caribbean and Latin America in the Miami/Dade County area. This grant goes to expand "Workers on the Move," building leadership capacity among UFD members through training and internships. [www.unitefordignity.org](http://www.unitefordignity.org)

The A.J. Muste Memorial Institute makes small grants to groups engaged in nonviolent education and action for social justice. Our next deadline is February 8, 2008. Guidelines are on our website at [www.ajmuste.org](http://www.ajmuste.org).

## Counter Recruitment Grants, September 2007

*The Muste Institute's Counter Recruitment Fund supports grassroots efforts to inform young people about the realities of military service, help them protect their privacy from recruiters and refer them to non-military education and employment options. Our next grant deadline is February 8, 2008. Guidelines are at [www.ajmuste.org/counterrecruit.htm](http://www.ajmuste.org/counterrecruit.htm)*

**Historic Peace Churches of Columbus**, Columbus, OH: \$500 for a project reaching out to guidance counselors in Columbus public schools, educating them on alternatives to military service, including vocational and educational resources for their students.

**NC Peace Action**, Raleigh, NC: \$1,200 for the Alternatives to Military Project, educating low income youth and youth of color in the Wilkes County, North Carolina area about the realities of military service and about educational and vocational alternatives.

**NJ Peace Action Education Fund**, Bloomfield, NJ: \$1,250 for Youth in Motion: Creating a Movement to Resist Military Recruitment, a campaign for a uniform statewide policy for informing parents and students of their right to opt




BAYPeace Youth Action Team members in front of their new Oakland office.

out of having their personal information released to military recruiters as allowed under the No Child Left Behind Act.


**BAYPeace: Better Alternatives for Youth**, Oakland, CA: \$1,500 to educate Bay Area youth about the realities of military service and non-military educational and vocational opportunities, and to build the capacity of young people to educate and organize their peers around these issues.

# ESSAY SERIES ON NONVIOLENCE

**A.J. Muste Memorial Institute**  
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BARBARA DEMING  
*On Revolution and Equilibrium*



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2. *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*
3. *Declaration of Independence from the War in Vietnam*

**#1: Martin Luther King, Jr.** — America's leading apostle of human dignity — *Loving Your Enemies; Letter from a Birmingham Jail; Declaration of Independence from the War in Vietnam*. Also available in Spanish — see #13.  
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**#2: Barbara Deming** — the feminist connection to nonviolence — *On Revolution and Equilibrium*  
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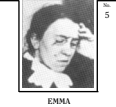
**#3: Henry David Thoreau** — the original architect of resistance — *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*  
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**#4: Jessie Wallace Hughan** — suffragist, peace activist, founder of the War Resisters League — *Pacifism and Invasion; On Duelling*  
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**#5: Emma Goldman** — fiery orator, anarchist, agitator for peace and liberation — *Preparedness: The Road to Universal Slaughter; The Individual, Society and the State*  
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**#6: Rosa Luxemburg** — courageous leader of Germany's democratic socialist movement — *Prison Letters*  
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**#7: A. J. Muste** — foremost 20th Century pacifist theoretician and activist, minister, socialist — *Who Has the Spiritual Atom Bomb?*  
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**#8: On Wars of Liberation** — three essays on nonviolence, freedom struggles, including analysis of Gandhi's position  
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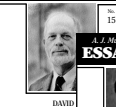
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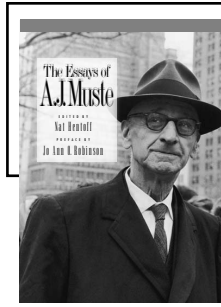
**#13: (Spanish) Martin Luther King, Jr.** — Spanish language translation of *Loving Your Enemies, Letter from a Birmingham Jail and Declaration of Independence from the War in Vietnam*.  
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**#14: Jeannette Rankin** — first woman in Congress, suffragist, pacifist — *"Two Votes Against War" and Other Writings on Peace*  
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**#15: David McReynolds** — longtime activist with the War Resisters League, Socialist Party presidential candidate — *A Philosophy of Nonviolence*  
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**Peace Agitator: The Story of A.J. Muste**, by Nat Hentoff  
A 250-page biography with many photos, profiling the grandfather of the U.S. peace movement — minister, labor activist, pacifist and resister. Introduction by Larry Gara.  
qty: \_\_\_\_\_

**Wear Your Peace Shirt**  
Muste Institute t-shirts are black cotton with a four-color geometric design and the words: "There is no way to peace, peace is the way — A.J. Muste" Available in large and extra large. Shirts are made in the U.S.A.



**The Essays of A.J. Muste**  
Edited by Nat Hentoff, preface by Jo Ann O. Robinson. Originally issued in 1967, this new 500-page edition includes Muste's Notes for an Autobiography, plus essays on pacifism, civil rights, trade unionism and foreign policy, written between 1905 and 1966.

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