

Q & A

WITH LOUIS MICHAEL

The Vallejo resident is part of the new crop of activists leading the charge to demand justice for their communities.

In June, he started Vessels of Vallejo, a community organization fighting police brutality in Vallejo and supporting the city's youth. We spoke with the young activist about his new organization, the struggle to make change, and why this movement is different.



Photojournalist and Martinez native Sarahbeth Maney shot this viral image of Louis Michael at an Oakland protest.

Raising His Voice

LOUIS MICHAEL HAD JUST GRADUATED WITH HIS BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN COMMUNICATIONS AND MOVED BACK TO VALLEJO WHEN GEORGE FLOYD WAS KILLED IN MINNESOTA. NOW, HIS LIFE HAS AN ENTIRELY NEW FOCUS.

PHOTOS BY SARAHBETH MANEY

What inspired you to take part in these protests?

When the protests first began, I went to an Oakland protest. I didn't [have a graduation] because of the coronavirus, so I went out in my cap and gown and protested. There were photos taken of me out there, and one of them went viral. It encouraged me to go to more protests and get more involved.

Every weekend, I was at a protest. Then, a friend invited me to help organize a protest out in Walnut Creek, and that was my first time getting involved in organizing. After that, another friend invited me to be a part of this organization called Richmond Revolution.

I was doing a lot of work for [them], but I felt like there was

this need in Vallejo, so I decided to branch off and use the same framework as Richmond Revolution to start Vessels of Vallejo.

We had our first action on June 13, and it was to honor Sean Monterrosa as well as all the other victims of the Vallejo Police Department. We've connected with a lot of the other organizations in Vallejo that have been doing this work.

Many of the issues addressed by this movement—police brutality, racial inequality—are not new. What makes this time different?

I never lived through a particular movement. In '23, I've been hearing a lot of older folks and older generations talking about how they've never seen anything like this.

I'm a communications guy, so I know that a lot of it has to do with the technology that we have available today. With everyone having access to this information and being connected, it's so much easier to see something and get involved....

There's a lot of young people of older people who we can learn from. There's a lot that can be accomplished by taking the wisdom of older people and the energy of young people and combining it all together to make an impact.

What were you seeing in Vallejo that led you to start your own organization?

I had just got back from Kansas; I'd been away for the last three years.

I didn't know a lot of what was going on. Even today, people don't know what's happening in Vallejo. Unless you're really involved and paying attention, you're not going to know what's happening here.

I didn't plan on Vessels getting involved in defund the police work. I wanted to grow Vessels to be this community organization that had a wide variety of issues that we help out with, like homelessness and youth outreach. But once I met all of these families who had been impacted and all of these organizations that had been doing this work—[such as] Vallejo Peace Project and Justice Coalition of Vallejo—I was like, wow, I had no idea. I kind of had to get a reality check.



"It's never too late to get involved. Movements have come and gone, but this one is here to stay."

—Louis Michael

What messages do you hope that Vallejoans and others outside of your community take away from your actions?

It's never too late to get involved. Movements have come and gone, but this one is here to stay, at least for a while.

It doesn't matter what you do and where you're from. Go out there and listen to these people who have been impacted directly. Listen to the families. Listen to the people of color. If you're not a person of color, try to be the best ally possible and center those voices who have lived this. If you are a person of color, get out there and have your voice heard. •

After this interview, Michael announced his candidacy for Vallejo City Council District 3. This article is not an endorsement. Follow Vessels of Vallejo at @vesselsvallejo.

GO ONLINE TO SEE MORE
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