

# *Remembrance*

## *African Activist Archive Project*

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### **A shanty awakes Baltimore**

**By Max Obuszewski**

#### *Editor's Introduction*

*Max Obuszewski was a member of the Baltimore Anti-Apartheid Coalition. At the time this was written he was the leader of the Baltimore Nonviolence Center.*

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The Baltimore Anti-Apartheid Coalition worked closely with the student group, Coalition for a Free South Africa, at Johns Hopkins University. On April 10, 1986, the student coalition erected a shanty on the lower quad on the Homewood Campus. The anti-apartheid coalitions were in the midst of a struggle to get the university to divest from its stock portfolio any companies doing business with apartheid South Africa.

On May 24, three fraternity brothers of the Delta Upsilon Fraternity engaged in a firebombing of the shanty, and were indicted on charges of arson, conspiracy and assault with intent to murder. Michael Moffa, 19, of Bellmore, N.Y., Richard Hoheb, 22, of Holmdel, N.J., and Russell Abrams, 20, of Riverdale, N.Y., were accused of throwing cups of gasoline on the shanty and setting it afire. Since the shanty was occupied 24/7, there were three students inside. One of them, Kevin Archer, a graduate student and Fulbright scholar, suffered first and second-degree burns. The nearby gulag, erected by right-wing students to oppose the Soviet Union, went untouched.

A judge sentenced the three former Johns Hopkins University fraternity members to three years' probation. He felt serious punishment would damage the students' futures. While the sentence confirmed guilt, the convicted former students would have the record expunged after three years. At the 1986 Hopkins commencement, "President Steven Muller branded the arsonists mortal enemies of the university." [Johns Hopkins Magazine, September 2005]. However, he would later prohibit, claiming concerns about safety, construction of "unauthorized structures." Regardless, Coalition members erected another shanty from the ashes of the firebombed shack.

When it became clear that the university intended to take down the shanty on September 29, a group of students and community activists sat around the structure to prevent it from being bulldozed. Some 14 were arrested, mostly Hopkins students, but also two community activists, Mary Bennis and Max Obuszewski, and a Morgan State student.

Baltimore state's attorney Kurt Schmoke decided not to prosecute the protesters. The following day, after the activists were released from jail, there was a noon time rally with some 200 supporters blaming Muller for ignoring the right to freedom of speech at the university. He caved in, and renounced his unauthorized structure policy. Soon thereafter, a shanty was rebuilt on the lower quad.

At an October 26 meeting of Hopkins' board of trustees, members voted to continue the university's policy of "selective divestiture." Members of the Coalition for a Free South Africa were greatly disappointed, and engaged in a nine-day occupation of Garland Hall, as that is where the office of the president is located. Unfortunately, the students, after a three-year campaign, were unsuccessful in getting Johns Hopkins University to divest from South Africa, as Steven Muller and the board of trustees decided instead to support apartheid.

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