



Pandemic Artistic Consequences

by Leslie M. Scott-Jones



New York, 42nd Street and 7th Avenue, around 1919 or 1920. The theater season of fall 1918 was busy, with stars like Harry Houdini and W.C. Fields onstage. Credit...New York Historical Society

Over two years ago, the entire world changed. Within 24-hours, we went from socially congregating every chance we could, to becoming a hermetically insular society cautious of even the slightest physical interaction. Some are better suited to isolation than others. Believe it or not, most artistic types are shy, introverted, sensitive people who most of the time would much rather be left alone with their own thoughts. For some artists, the pandemic shutdown was a salve for a life that was moving at an uncontrollable pace. It became a way to step back and gain perspective, and possibly make course corrections. For others it was time found, where some had been lost, to complete a project or start a project that had been a distant wish. No matter how you reacted to the shutdown, whether you saw it as medicine or poison, its effect on how, why, when, and how much we create cannot be denied.

In the 1918 flu pandemic, New York theaters refused to close and movie houses were also kept open. Shows like Ziegfeld Follies made their bones off pandemic audiences desperate for entertainment. The health commissioner of New York, Rupert Blue, kept things open for morale saying:

“My aim was to prevent panic, hysteria, mental disturbance, and thus to protect the public from the condition of mind that in itself predisposes to physical ills.”

Commissioner Blue, however, was mistaken in his assumption that depression and anxiety leads to other illnesses. A recent study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that from August, 2020 to February, 2021, the percentage of adults with recent symptoms of anxiety and depression increased from 36.4 percent to 41.5 percent. Dr. Richard A. Friedman wrote in The New York Times on May 4, 2021 that a spike of the correlating illnesses Commissioner Blue had worried about in 1918 did not occur. Instead, the pandemic actually removed barriers for Black folx to acknowledge and assess their stresses and depression, leading to a healthier overall populace. But there is a part of the effect we have been overlooking, specifically the effect the pandemic itself has had on our thinking, our choices, and, most of all, our reactions.

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I think all in all, one thing a lot of plays seem to be saying is that we need to, as black Americans, to make a connection with our past in order to determine the kind of future we're going to have. In other words, we simply need to know who we are in relation to our historical presence in America.

August Wilson, Playwright

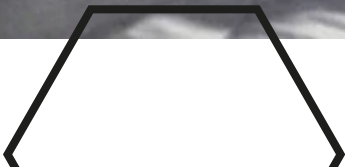
Moving forward to this century’s pandemic, it seems the world stopped. Delivery services and grocery stores seemed to be the only respite from staring at the same four walls of one’s home. Amid concerns of psychological, financial, and social consequences of the pandemic, we can’t ignore the trauma COVID-19 is still creating. As primarily a theatrical artist, you could argue that artistically I was affected more than others. It changed Black art, but it also changed what we think about art in general, and ours in particular. Black artists creating in private suddenly found outlets and access to produce their work. Pandemic restrictions forced theaters to cultivate online audiences and performers to evaluate how they connected with an audience at its basic level. This “back to basics” approach gave Black theatre makers options to explore—some of them for the first time in their artistic life; it gave them the option to create content through a lens unencumbered by an intrusive and often fragile white gaze.

When thinking about how Black folx—formed and reformed through slavery, Jim Crow, Black Codes, and segregation—have survived rather than thrived, it’s no wonder that in some ways we were conditioned for a global pandemic. Surviving in chaos is the way Black bodies have become accustomed to exist. When an actual pandemic was layered on, we did what we have always done. Adjusted in order to survive.



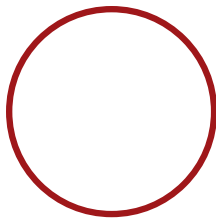
In an article entitled Coronavirus Trauma and African Americans’ Mental Health: Seizing Opportunities for Transformational Change, Dr. Lonnie Snowden and Dr. Jonathan Snowden state that:

“The COVID-19 pandemic is a natural disaster of historic proportions with widespread and profound psychological sequelae. African Americans fall ill and die more than whites from COVID and more survivors and loved ones face psychological risk. African Americans also experience greater personal, social, and financial stress even when not personally touched by COVID illness, and they are again vulnerable as COVID diminishes African American community’s capacity for mutual support.”



Black people were already surviving within pandemic-like conditions, personally ill or not. The initial reaction of using the shutdown to produce content hit Black artists differently than color redacted colleagues. It afforded moments to process emotions that everyday life had never afforded before, while simultaneously living within our forced daily struggle. Work created or completed within this bubble became about the wide and varied struggle being Black in america poses. It's a conversation that may not have happened on this scale without the global intervention of this pandemic. Social justice protests, the We See You White American Theater movement, and the bandwagon of performative or well-meaning anti-racists, created a perfect storm for the acceptability of Black artists to speak about being Black in ways that were not possible before. For Black artists, this wave of interest in the Black voice created an increased need for our work at the exact time the pandemic created space for us to do it.

On a regular day we can't relax, rest, or participate in self-care. During the pandemic it seemed near impossible to simply enjoy the stillness. In the same ways white society demands Blackness for consumption, we felt a drive to create the supply for that demand. Such is the essence of a trauma response rooted in anti-Blackness.



Patrick Martinez, Racism Doesn't Rest During A Pandemic

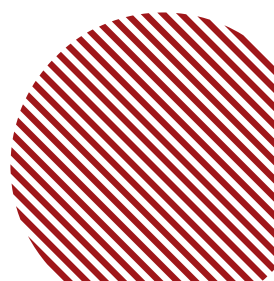
Black people, Black artists in particular, must find a way to make sure it does not become the norm, as the initial response to the pandemic lifts for white counterparts. Unarguably, there can be no light without dark and our existence on these shores is a dark and varied tale. We must be able to consider, with a perspective rooted in self-care and liberation, how the layering of a global pandemic onto Black life in america altered (yet again) the type and veracity of the daily trauma we navigate, the consequences it has had on our artistic choices, and our ability to begin, artistically and personally, to thrive.

Additional Reading:

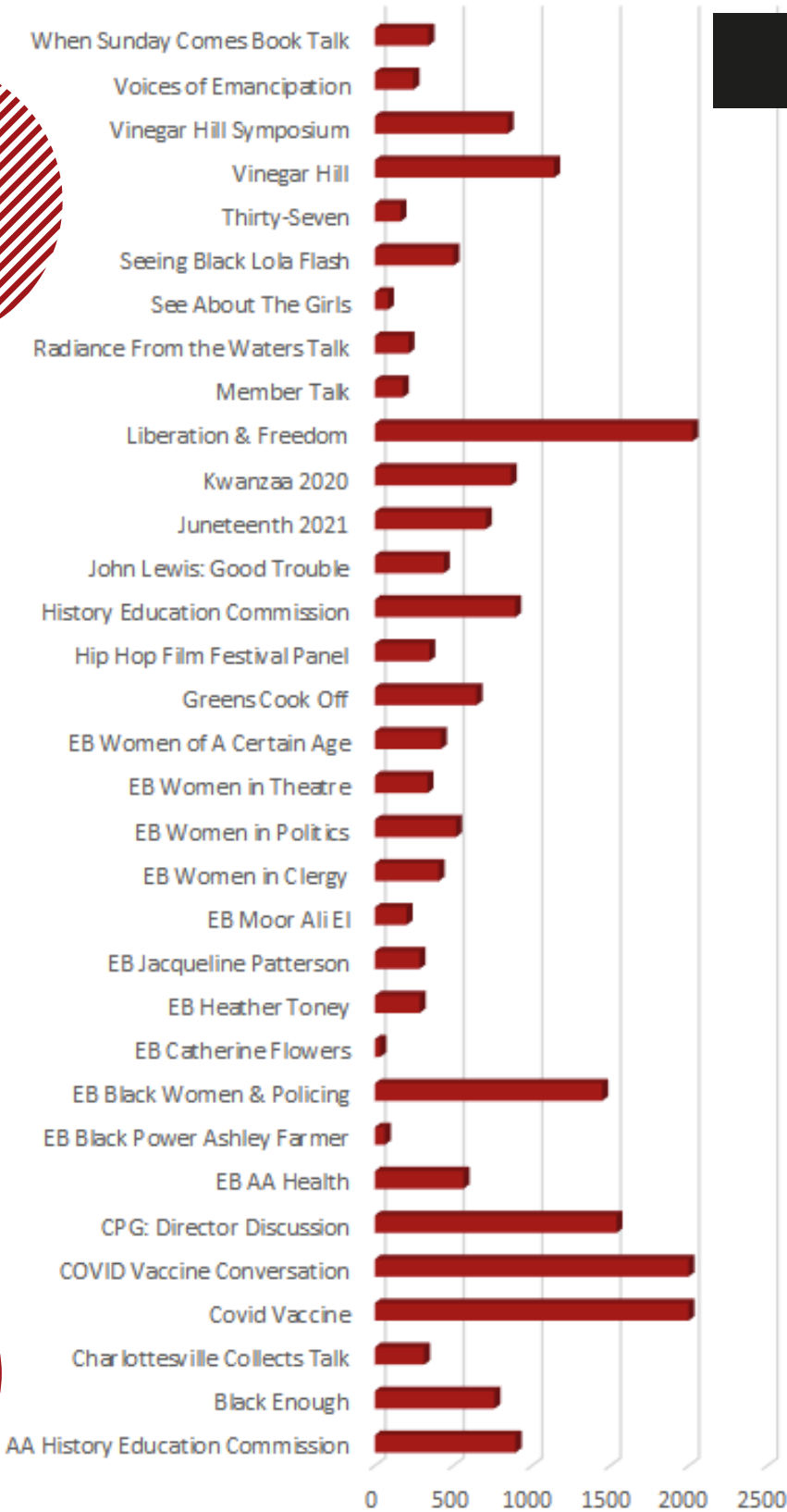
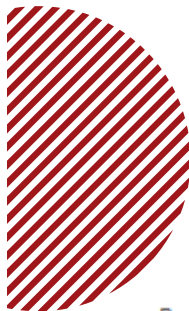
Heather McGhee, *The Sum of Us What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together* (Penguin Random House Publishing, 2021)

Marshall Shorts, "Black Creatives Have Something to Say - Who's Listening?" (TEDx Talks, TEDxColumbus, 2016)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YjHSx0xmXtU&t=14s>

Sam Pollard, *Black Art: In the Absence of Light* (HBO Documentary, 2021)
<https://www.hbo.com/documentaries/black-art-in-the-absence-of-light>



Our Programs & Impact

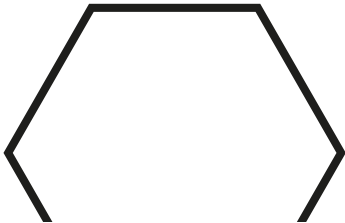
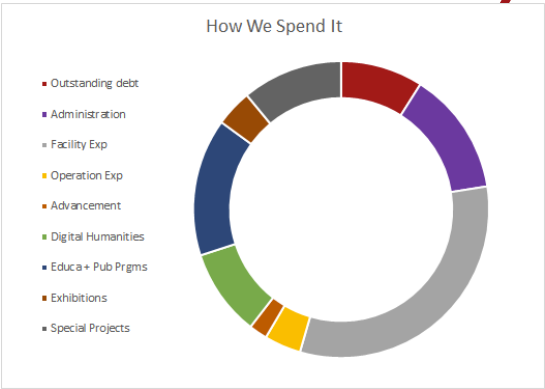
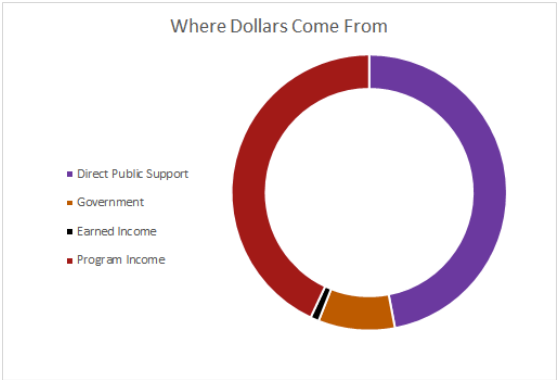


21,183

community members engaged in our programming

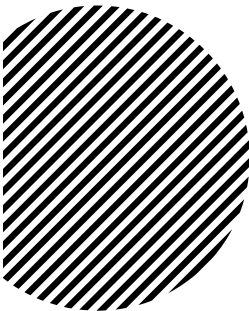
7,591

total followers on all of our social media accounts like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram



Mapping Cville Completes Data Collection and Launches Mapping Albemarle

by Jordy Yager



On a chilly pre-pandemic morning in November, 2019, we officially launched the Mapping Cville project as more than 85 people piled into the Heritage Center and began analyzing thousands of old and cumbersome property records.

Buried within these records are more than 50 years worth of racist covenants that indelibly altered the course of generational home ownership, prosperity, and wealth for thousands of people in our community.

In the 1930’s, the federally-sponsored Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) created a series of maps for major U.S. cities, using different colors to shade entire neighborhoods—from green or “best”, to red or “hazardous”. These “redlining” maps, as they became known, kept financial opportunities away from hundreds of thousands of Black Americans at the most critical moment, coming out of the Great Depression. Charlottesville, however, was too small a city and did not receive such a map. Instead, our city-wide “redlining” practices took the form of racist covenants and zoning codes, but the full extent of these—how widespread, how enduring, how engulfing—is a question we’ve never answered, until now.

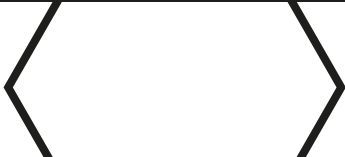
Over the last 17 months, through the heart of the pandemic, more than 750 people across Charlottesville and Albemarle County volunteered countless hours to help us comb through 152,000 pages of property records from 1903-1956. And now, we have officially completed our data collection, having created a giant spreadsheet of intricate details that will serve as the foundational core of Charlottesville’s first racist covenant map.

Over the next several months, our Isabella Gibbons Local History Center will be busily mapping these deeds in GIS (geospatial information system); to-date we’ve mapped more than 600 of the 2,021 total, or about 30%.

Last year, students at CHS reflected on their experience working with JSAAHC’s Mapping Cville project:

“We should be going back to look at these old records to get this history right. If we come together [over these facts], we can create true equity [in Charlottesville].” — CHS student

“It felt enlightening and empowering....It felt like I was in the past decoding an actual document.” — CHS student



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Thank you for your generous support which allows us to continue to convene important conversations and educate our community and others about our local African American history. Names in bold indicate active members. We endeavor to ensure that details regarding our donors are correct, and we regret any inaccuracies. Please contact us to make corrections if necessary.

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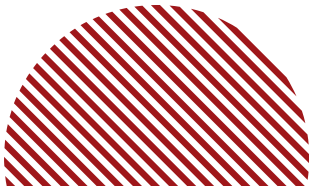
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Our Beliefs
We believe that engaging with the nuances of African American history and culture leads to a deeper understanding of American history and culture.

Our Goals
Our Center is a convening space for visitors to consider the intersections of local and global social practice and to gain a greater understanding of ourselves and others.

Our Work
Through a series of interdisciplinary programs we describe the cultural production and historical relevance of Black people from the post-Emancipation era to the present moment.



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Tha Pack Motorcycle Club Juneteenth 2021



Our Mission
Highlighting African American history and culture of the African diaspora.

Located in the historic Jefferson School City Center, the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center's mission is to honor and preserve the rich heritage and legacy of the African American community of Charlottesville/Albemarle, Virginia and to promote a greater appreciation for, and understanding of the contributions of African Americans and peoples of the Diaspora.

CPG 2021 AMPLIFY Season

original stories
from the BLACK perspective.

vinegar hill by teresa dowell-vest

thirty-seven by leslie m. scott-jones

see about the girls by ti ames

tanisha by david vaughn-straughn

she echoes on the vine by aiyana marcus

Jefferson School

AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE CENTER

charlottesville players guild



Filmmaker Kevin Troy presents to Eko Ise Discover students.

We've also digitized more than 20 years of City Council minutes, which contain countless petitions and requests from neighborhoods as they attempt to develop their basic infrastructure, such as access to water and sewer lines, paved streets, planted trees, and more.



We know, for instance, that in 1917 the Black neighborhood of Kellytown was denied access to water and sewer lines at the same time that white neighborhoods were being granted that access. Over the last two years, we've worked with UVA Prof. Barbara Brown Wilson and her students to analyze and map these early 20th century requests,

and ultimately this will be the second layer added to the JSAAHC's map of racist covenants. Together they will show the relationship between racialized housing policies and taxpayer-funded quality-of-life infrastructure investments.

As important as all of this may be, how does it live in the world? Since last September, we've engaged and talked about this history with more than 1,245 people, including 100 students at Charlottesville High School, 112 teachers and administrators within the Charlottesville City Schools System, 40 at Greenbrier Elementary School specifically, and 85 private school students and teachers.

We have also begun partnering with Albemarle County's Office of Equity and Inclusion and the County's Community Development and Planning Offices to launch Mapping Albemarle, which over the next year will use a similar public engagement and educational process for county residents to engage with this backyard history and complete the county's first racial covenant map.

All this will happen as we log, analyze, and map the city's remaining infrastructure records and prepare for the installation of a comprehensive exhibition at the JSAAHC this winter, which will tell the whole story of these policies, the corresponding infrastructure investment and neglect, first-person testimonials about the impacts of these policies, the role of the banks and financial institutions, notable real estate moguls, UVA, the health department, and many others.

Additional Reading:
Race For Profit by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (2019)
White Space, Black Hood by Sheryll Cashin (2021)
An Ordinance to Secure for White and Colored People a Separate Location of Residence for Each Race, by Karen C. Waters-Wicks in the Magazine of Albemarle Charlottesville History (2014)

Evelyn Barbour Lecture Series
by Sherry Bryant

In the past few decades, the terms “climate change” and “sustainability” have come into everyday vernacular. There has been a nationwide emphasis on policy work related to preventing climate change, wildlife conservationist efforts, and a focus on renewable, clean sources of energy. While these causes are worthwhile, the national discourse on climate policy largely overlooks the environmental justice work that African American people and communities have historically done and continue to do related to the environmental issues that plague their communities.



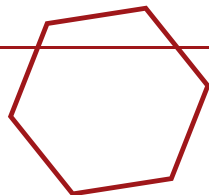
Jacqueline Patterson, Director of NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program

Appropriately, this year’s Evelyn Barbour Lecture Series is centered around climate change and the distinction between “climate justice” and “environmental justice.” Our conversation addresses the impact of climate change not only on the physical landscape, but on people’s lives as well. In this series, we aim to explore the intersectionality of social justice, gentrification and science to examine how we treat our world and the people that inhabit it.

Evelyn Barbour was a beloved pillar of the African American community. She was an alumnus of the Jefferson School, among the first graduating class from Jackson P. Burley High School, an alumnus of Virginia Union University and the University of Virginia School of Education. She was an educator for over 30 years and a lifelong member of Mount Zion First African Baptist Church, where she carried out the role of historian with fervor. Ms. Evelyn passed away in 2014 at the age of 78. The Evelyn Barbour Lecture Series celebrates her work as an educator and historian by creating oral histories in the form of conversation and connection.

For this year’s series, we sought out conversations with individuals we here at the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center refer to as Climate Warriors--champions of efforts to educate about and ameliorate the environmental, cultural and social damage borne by African Americans and other communities of color.





We have had the opportunity to speak with Climate Warriors, whose roles vary, but whose missions very much align. Our panelists ranged from individuals in national leadership positions that are driving policy change and sourcing funding opportunities for Black environmental activists to frontline organizers engaged in Black communities at the grassroots level, like Moor Ali El who specializes in youth development and enabling young people to become involved in improving their communities through many avenues, including environmental justice.



The lecture series is available on our Facebook and Youtube pages and you can find new episodes following the live sessions. We want to take some time to highlight some impactful conversations we’ve had so far with Climate Warriors across the country.

We spoke with Catherine Coleman Flowers, an environmental and climate justice activist whose focus is bringing attention to the largely overlooked issue of inadequate waste and water sanitation infrastructure in rural communities in the United States. The MacArthur Foundation Genius Award winner grew up in rural Lowndes County, Alabama where she observed widespread health issues in the community connected to lack of access to sanitation and wastewater infrastructure. She discusses how in comparable rural locales, it is not uncommon for above ground septic systems to fail during heavy rainfall due to high water tables and leave sewage flooding the yards and streets of the community.

Affected communities like Lowndes are often rural and predominantly non-white. They are also inextricably linked to areas that were redlined in the mid-20th century and thereafter denied access to systems including sewer lines and wastewater infrastructure. By extension the economic growth of these areas is stunted--these communities have a hard time maintaining and attracting businesses without basic access to sanitation. The connection between historically segregated housing policies, denial of access to public works and the resultant barriers to economic growth for those communities is observable all over the country, and Charlottesville is no exception.

Flowers is leading efforts to locate and map wastewater infrastructure and public works data across the United States to begin to chart a path ahead for widespread solutions. She urges members of communities that are being affected by lack of access to these services to speak up, speak out, report issues related to wastewater infrastructure and demand access to this basic human right.



Evelyn Barbour Lecture Series

We had the opportunity to speak with environmentalist Heather McTeer Toney, the first Black mayor of Greenville, MS and a Regional Administrator of the EPA for the Southeast under the Obama administration. Like many of our Climate Warriors, Toney's environmental activism began at an early age. Her pioneering climate action work also addresses improving infrastructure to poor, Black communities. In our conversation with Toney, we learned about initiatives around getting mothers involved with clean air efforts in response to adverse health effects to air pollution including asthma as well as her battle against climate complacency--a lack of national attention to climate disasters and the locales they affect, as well as the subpar recovery efforts in communities of color that follow.



Toney, pictured left, aims to shift the mentality around climate activism to bring awareness and funding to the work that communities of color are already doing in environmental justice. She sounds the call for other great minds of the community to ensure that they are a part of conversations around innovation in sustainability and the opportunities that will emerge in the coming Green Economy.

Our next conversation with Jacqui Patterson, the Senior Director of the NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program, revealed the contrast in environmental activism she observed in her work internationally and how climate activism plays out in the United States.

While the climate justice narrative in the United States is dominated largely by environmental interest groups, elsewhere this work is led by local organizers that are responsive to issues in their communities and focus on intersectional solutions that stand to benefit multiple groups of people. She points out that while there are growing efforts to fund climate action related to conservationist efforts, philanthropic endeavors are not reaching environmental efforts to mitigate the lasting damage inflicted on communities of color. Patterson encourages individuals to get involved with their local NAACP branches, most of which have environmental and climate justice arms. Looking forward, we ask ourselves: Knowing that we already have champions of environmental justice in our communities, what does a central Black Climate Movement look like? Stay tuned as our series continues.

Additional Reading:

Flowers, Catherine Coleman. *Waste: One Woman's Fight Against America's Dirty Secret*. The New Press, 2020.

Toney, Heather McTeer. "The Price of Normalizing Climate Disasters." *Dame Magazine*, 14 Sept. 2020.

Dennis, Brady and Fears, Darryl. "'This is environmental racism' How a protest in a North Carolina farming town sparked a national movement." *Washington Post*. 6 Apr. 2021.

On The Topic of Reparations

by Dr. Andrea Douglas



Ta-Nehisi Coates' article *The Case for Reparations* appeared in *Atlantic Magazine* in 2014 and brought the subject of reparations into the broader public discourse. Since that moment, the mere mention of the word reparations has had a polarizing effect. However, Coates was not alone nor was he the first to assert the opinion that descendants of enslaved people deserved compensation for their forced labour and social stagnation after Emancipation and the end of colonialism.

In the English Caribbean, the CARICOM Reparations Committee was formed in 2013 to prepare the reparations case "for African descendant communities who are the victims of crimes against humanity in the forms of genocide, slavery, slave trading and racial apartheid." In creating its ten point plan, the committee declared that those who committed these crimes and have been "enriched by the proceeds of these crimes, have a reparatory case to answer." To this end, the plan demands that European countries pay for repatriation of those who want to return to Africa, and debt cancellation for countries that have amassed debilitating debt.



In the United States, congressional bill HR40 was first introduced in 1989 by Detroit Representative John Conyers. The bill would establish a commission to study and develop reparations proposals for African Americans as well as a formal apology for the "perpetration of gross human rights violation in crimes against humanity of African slaves and their descendants." HR40 had not received much traction until February of this year when it was finally considered on the house floor. The bill is supported by a national reparations movement, led by the National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC), an organization established in 2015 and comprised of seventeen commissioners from the fields of law, medicine, academia, history, civil rights and social justice advocacy. The NAARC and other proponents of the bill believe that reparations are crucial for repair.

On The Topic of Reparations

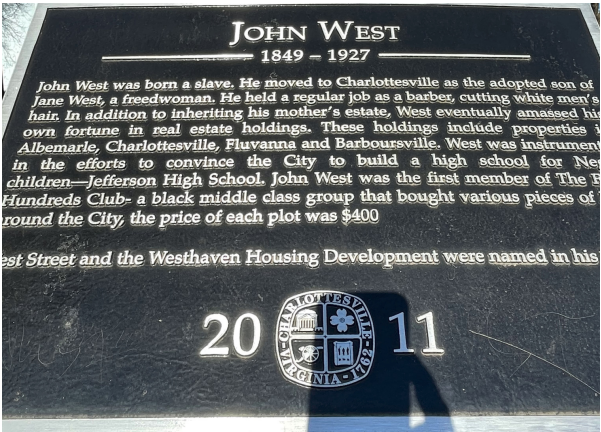
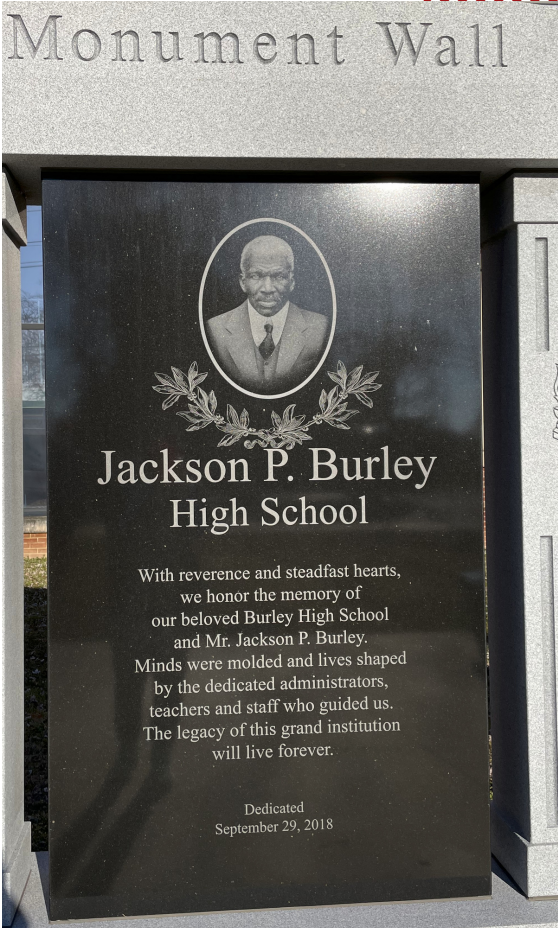
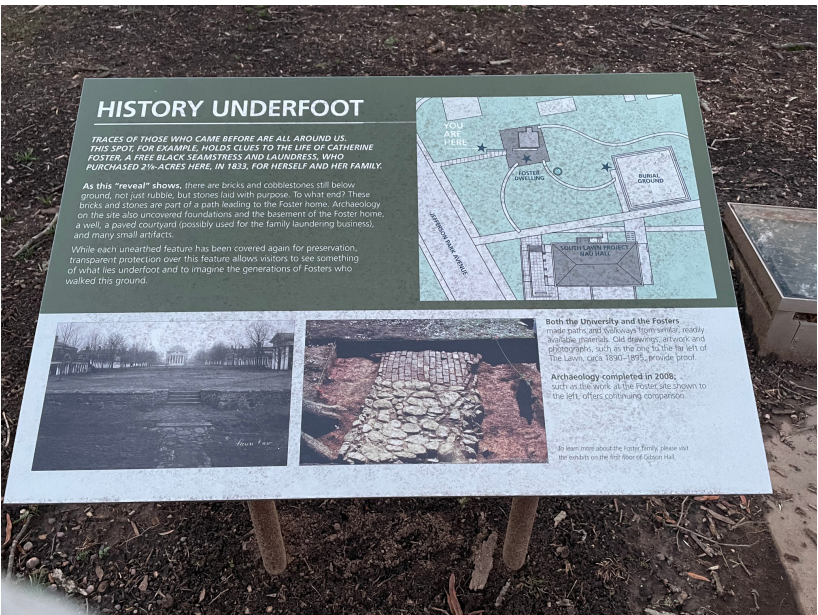
The need to define repair purports a qualitative and quantitative structure for both sides of the question. The extensive history of Black predation through which a white supremacist system has been maintained has had wide spread economic and social impact. In Charlottesville, the extensive history of Black land displacement, disproportionate incarceration rates, unequal education resources, and limited public health options suggest the range of social inequities that could be considered in a conversation about repair. To date, examples of repair include Georgetown University’s tuition fund established to ensure that descendants of those enslaved person sold by the University receive free education at the institution. In Evanston Illinois, a process was established to reimburse Black citizens for home repair and the bill signed by Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam in May to create the Enslaved Ancestors College Access Scholarship and Memorial Program. The bill is aimed at holding universities in the commonwealth economically accountable for profiting off of slavery. The affected universities, Longwood, University of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University and William and Mary have until June 2022 to create their scholarship programs.

Repair in Charlottesville has taken the form of name changes for streets, the removal of Confederate statues, and the replacement of Thomas Jefferson’s birthday with Liberation and Freedom day as city holidays. Liberation and Freedom day is celebrated on March 3, and its recognition is now a citywide, week-long event. The JSAAHC has been an active participant in local and state conversations about reparations. At the state level, Andrea Douglas was appointed to the Governor’s Commission to Study Slavery and Subsequent De Jure and De Facto Racial and Economic Discrimination Against African Americans. Locally she joined the President’s Commission on Slavery at the University in 2013 and continued working in the vein as the co-chair of The President’s Commission in the Age of Segregation at the University.



Both commissions have worked to identify the environment of enslavement and its subsequent impact on the local community. While not strict advocates for payment of reparations, the commissions have championed the idea of truth-telling and community education as important avenues to repair. In 2021 the Heritage Center launched its first annual Liberation and Freedom Reparations run/walk. The Center created a 9.3 mile walk that included all of the City’s important African American locations and Black businesses along the route. Two hundred and twenty-nine people participated in the run and raised \$25,000 that was divided amongst five organizations: the African American Teaching Fellows, 101.3 Jamz, the Charlottesville Albemarle NAACP, JSAAHC, the Vinegar Hill Magazine and We Code Too.

Each of these organizations have Black leadership and serve the community directly. The event was a true success since many of the participants indicated they had not known of the existence or importance of many of the locations on the route. The JSAAHC used its funding to support Embracing Our Narratives (EON), its summer teacher institute. In its first year, EON has already trained 65 teachers in local history. We firmly believe that creating an avenue to public history and direct action goes a long way to repair. Plans have already begun for next year's event.



Additional reading:
Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations", The Atlantic Magazine, 2014
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>
William Darity and A. Kristen Mullen, From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century (University of North Carolina Press, 2020)
A City Steps Toward Reparations, NYTimes, July 12, 2021
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/12/podcasts/the-daily/evanston-racial-reparations.html?showTranscript=1>

TRAILBLAZER SUMMER

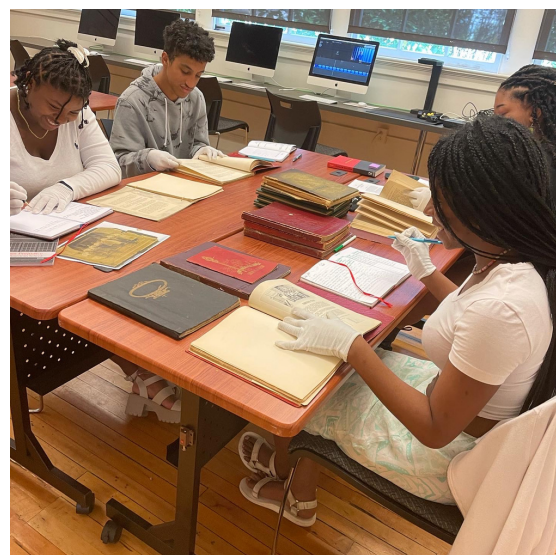


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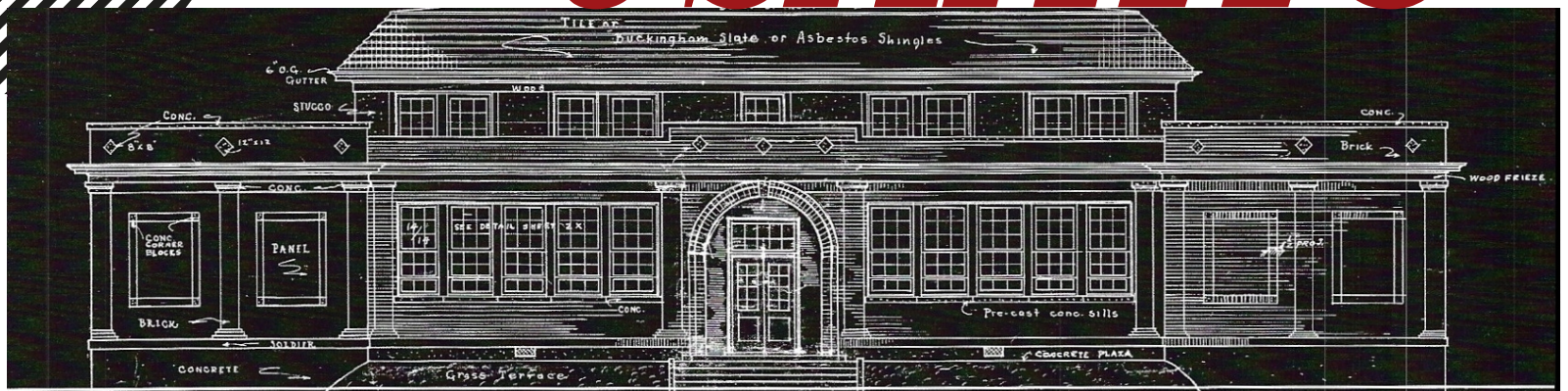
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LAUGHTER



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