

IN-DEPTH

A GRAY AREA

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▲ **MARCH ON WASHINGTON—Hundreds of protesters join the March to Confront White Supremacy in D.C. on Sept. 6.**

▶ **TO BE DETERMINED — Graffiti on the student walk outside J.E.B. Stuart High School alludes to the school's new name, which will be decided on Oct. 26.**

Hundreds descended upon the National Mall on a gray Washington day, reclaiming the streets built by slaves over 200 years before. They passed by the very steps where Martin Luther King, Jr. shared his dream of civil rights in the sweltering heat of August 1963.

Many of these protesters had been marching 10 days through Virginia as part of the March to Confront White Supremacy, a response to the violent events that transpired in August in Charlottesville. Though the marchers passed through Fairfax County, the racism they chanted about remains.

Government teacher Julia Braxton personally experienced this as a student at the University of Virginia. When Braxton left her apartment at UVA in 2015, an unexpected symbol was hanging from her neighbor's door.

"I saw a Confederate flag, which [I'd] never seen before," Braxton said. "And it had an AK-47 on it."

Emblazoned with the words, 'I dare you to come take it,' her neighbor's display was one of many racially charged incidents within the UVA community over the past few years. Just before Braxton's experience, a black UVA student, Martese Johnson, had a violent encounter with Alcoholic Beverage Control agents that made national news.

"A UVA student had been assaulted and bloodied by the police after they thought he had a fake ID," Braxton said. "After that incident occurred, the environment on grounds was very different and very racially charged... It brought out the worst of UVA in many ways."

Two years later, UVA has made national headlines once more. On Aug. 11 and 12, a gathering of white supremacists and neo-Nazis protested on campus and in the city of Charlottesville against the Charlottesville City Council's decision to remove a statue of Robert E. Lee from a park.

While racism, hate and discrimination seemed far removed from students and faculty at UVA, the events of early August again confirmed that such principles survive in Virginia.

"I think I can speak for a lot of UVA students that it disgusted me that this kind of hate was walking around our school," said Liam Zeya, a UVA student and McLean Class of 2016 graduate. "It was difficult for me to wrap my head around [the idea] that this type of political energy exists today and was in a place I call home."

The demonstrations that impacted the UVA campus provoked a great deal of student response. Organizations most targeted by the displays, such as the Black Student Alliance and the Minority Rights Coalition, have gathered support and facilitated dialogue about the

incidents and their prevention.

"It's caused a lot of people to realize [that] we need to be having these conversations. We need to put ourselves in the shoes of other people," said Meaghan O'Reilly, a UVA student and McLean Class of 2016 graduate. "Are we perpetuating systems of oppression here? Are we creating an environment in which some people don't feel safe or valued?"

Many student organizations have been campaigning to remove traces of a complicated history from their school buildings and grounds.

"They were just so outraged and they were so angry, and they genuinely felt that seeing these names on the buildings made them feel unsafe," said Shivani Saboo, a UVA student council representative and McLean Class of 2016 graduate. "It impacted them so much; they were so scared, they were crying [and] they were yelling."

The debate over how to properly address Virginia's history is not confined to the campus of UVA, but pervades Fairfax County as well, most notably with the renaming of J.E.B. Stuart High School.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

There are more public monuments to the Confederacy in Virginia than in any other state. J.E.B. Stuart High School, six miles from McLean, is just one of these places. Stuart, a cavalry commander and general, fought for the Confederacy and was an affluent slaveholder.

"When Stuart was opened, it was the same time frame as McLean High School...it was after the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* and there was active resistance in Virginia," said a visibly emotional Jane Strauss, chair of the Fairfax County School Board. "It was very difficult. I was in high school and I was appalled by what was happening in Virginia. I've publicly cried twice over this."

J.E.B. Stuart High was named in 1959, the same year the Fairfax County School Board was forced by lawsuits to create a plan to desegregate public schools. The plan would not have integrated schools fully until 1971, 17 years after the landmark *Brown* decision.

"None of us can actually know what was in the hearts and the minds of the school board at the time...but we certainly know the history of the times that surrounded Virginia and the segregation of schools," Strauss said.

Opposition to the high school's name came to the forefront two years ago after the shooting of African-American churchgoers in Charleston, South Carolina, by white supremacist Dylann Roof. Shortly afterwards, 39,000 people signed a change.org petition to rename J.E.B. Stuart that was created by former Stuart student and Oscar-winning actress Julianne Moore.

Moore declined to comment for this article.

Students at J.E.B. Stuart, 78 percent of whom are minorities, appealed to the school board, finding discomfort in going to a school named after a Confederate general.

"A black student at J.E.B. Stuart...said to me that she



was happy she did not have to take gym class anymore, because she did not want to wear 'Stuart' on the back of her shirt," said Peggy Fox, WUSA 9 Northern Virginia Bureau Chief. "Why should we force a black person who believes that this is the name of a Confederate leader who fought for the South—the South trying to preserve slavery—why should we force her to wear that name?"

That student, sophomore Kayla Longmyer, has become a major proponent for changing the name. Longmyer was obligated to wear uniforms that bore the name of a Confederate leader, which she resents.

"We were forced to buy the uniforms and the uniforms have 'Stuart' on them. I really don't want to do that again. I don't want to have to wear that," Longmyer said.

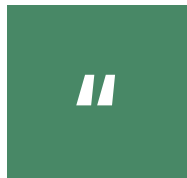
The movement to change the name was mostly student-run, as Stuart senior Lily Beres attests.

"People didn't really know much about it until the middle of last year, and then we got 150 kids to wear T-shirts to school that said 'change the name,'" Beres said. "That was a really interesting moment after such a long time working toward [the name change]."

Though the J.E.B. Stuart name bears a negative connotation for many, others—including alumni—have a different view of the issue.

"Alumni and students at J.E.B. Stuart, when they think about the name, they're not necessarily thinking about the Confederate soldier. They're thinking about their friends, their experiences, the community around them, and that should not be underappreciated," said Chris Grisafe, the unsuccessful Republican candidate for school board, at an Aug. 23 candidate forum. "When you pull the name, and especially if you frame it as, 'Hey, you're a bigot if you don't,' that tears the community apart unnecessarily."

McLean students have also taken both sides on whether or not J.E.B. Stuart should be renamed. ▶



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-WUSA9 Northern Virginia Bureau Chief Peggy Fox



RECLAIMING THE STREETS — The rainy weather didn't stop protesters from chanting as they approached the Lincoln Memorial (top) and Georgetown (bottom).

"The issue I have with changing all this is...we're wasting money that could be going to other programs that help people," senior Ryan Murn said. "The debate should really be how we should be educating our children on why this happened and why it's bad."

Others have pointed out that the renamed J.E.B. Stuart would be an opportunity to honor minorities. Of Fairfax's 25 high schools, none are named after women or people of color.

"There are plenty of better people that we could have monuments to that we don't have monuments to," senior Ellie Hall said. "There are plenty of women and people of color who have done important things in this area."

A May 2016 community survey indicated 56 percent of the Stuart pyramid was against changing the name, yet the Fairfax County School Board still resoundingly voted 7-2 in favor of the change in July.

"There are some that will still be angry that we've [renamed J.E.B. Stuart], but I have to stand up for what I believe in," Strauss said. "We are not erasing history... we are listening to the hearts and minds of our students."

Fox agrees with Strauss that renaming schools does not erase history.

"People do not like change. They're so attached to statues and names," Fox said. "But changing a name does not erase history. It's still printed in the history books."

WHITEWASHED

The conflict over Virginia's history of discrimination does not merely extend to J.E.B. Stuart, but to classrooms across Fairfax County. In May, a George Mason University study concluded that FCPS hires African American teachers at a disproportionately lower rate, asserting it is not just a lack of black teaching applicants, but rather an example of workforce discrimination.

While examining job application data in 2012, the study's authors found that both black and white applicants were similarly qualified in terms of test scores and credentials. However, while 13 percent of the applicant pool was black and 70 percent of the applicant pool was white, black applicants only received six percent of job offers while white applicants made up 77 percent of job offers.

"I don't think that we are looking at racism going on. We just need to have improved practices," Strauss said.

The school board has taken measures to increase the amount of minority teachers, including raising salaries and allowing Fairfax schools to hire earlier, alongside other means of closely monitoring applicant pools.

"It's hiring earlier, it's making sure that principals are interviewing a diverse pool, and then it's re-training everybody...also, we are increasing pay," Strauss said. "There is no one demographic that has a majority; we are

just everybody. And so, we are determined to improve our abilities to attain a diverse pool of staff."

The most recent data for the 2016-17 school year shows that only about 18 percent of Fairfax teachers are minorities, compared to a student population that is 59 percent minority. Strauss attributes much of this gap to the personal networks a potential teacher or principal may have developed in their communities.

"A certain number of hires will be interviewed at the school who may not initially be drawn from the central pool. These applicants may already be known to the principal or others working at the school," Strauss said.

The Mason study also found that when minority teachers were being hired, they were employed by schools of lower socioeconomic status than that of their white counterparts. Braxton attributes this to the altruism of the prospective hirees.

"A lot of my [black] colleagues felt an obligation to help higher need areas," Braxton said. "We know that those areas have a really hard time finding teachers who are willing or able to teach their kids."

Despite the limiting factors, McLean saw a more diverse group of hires for the 2017-18 school year. Principal Ellen Reilly does not accredit this to the improved practices, but to the overall appeal of the school.

"We did a really good job this year of hiring a more diverse staff. Truthfully though, it has not come from me going out to try," Reilly said. "It was just that we [had] people coming here and wanting to be here. I got lucky."

A low concentration of minority teachers is not unique to FCPS. According to findings by the Albert Shanker Institute and the American Federation of Teachers, the shortage of minority teachers is a nationwide problem—minorities only account for 17 percent of teachers on average nationwide.

"[It's] not just African Americans—it's Hispanic, it's Asian, it's the French native speakers, it's anybody," Strauss said. "We are the world and we want the world to be working for us."

THE AFTERMATH

At its heart, the U.S. was founded upon diversity and cultural inclusion. However, this does not make the country immune from discrimination. The events in Charlottesville brought to the surface the complicated legacy of discrimination in U.S. history.

"This event really could have happened in a lot of different places...before, I never thought [it] could ever happen at a place like UVA, but it did, and it was really horrific," Zeya said.

The protests and debates that are still happening on campus have resonated throughout the university community.

"This is probably something that's going to stick with the students and the faculty for a really long time,"



PEACE OUT — A woman shows her solidarity with the March to Confront White Supremacy amongst a group of protesters on the streets of Georgetown.

O'Reilly said. "Just figuring out how to portray the events that happened here and how to discuss them... [it] isn't something that's going to go away quickly."

Even in Fairfax County, Robert E. Lee High School, Lee Highway, Jefferson Davis Highway and other names and statues are prevalent symbols of a complicated past. In the coming years, communities across the state will have to confront this troubled history.

"This has been a problem in Virginia for a lot of years. It's a very Southern state in its heart," state delegate Kathleen Murphy said. "The statues really just serve to deepen our political and ethnic divide... instead of instructing us about the history of the commonwealth, I think that they incite violence."

On the state level, Murphy said legislators are seeking a resolution to these long-standing issues.

"We're going to be, as a caucus, looking at how we put forth several bills and see which ones that we can get passed," Murphy said.

However, Murphy believes legislative and government actions are only one part of eliminating racism.

"When you go over to schools, you still hear young kids using the n-word like it's an okay thing to do because they're so young and so cool. It's never okay," Murphy said. "All of us can make it better when we stand up and we say that it is never okay."

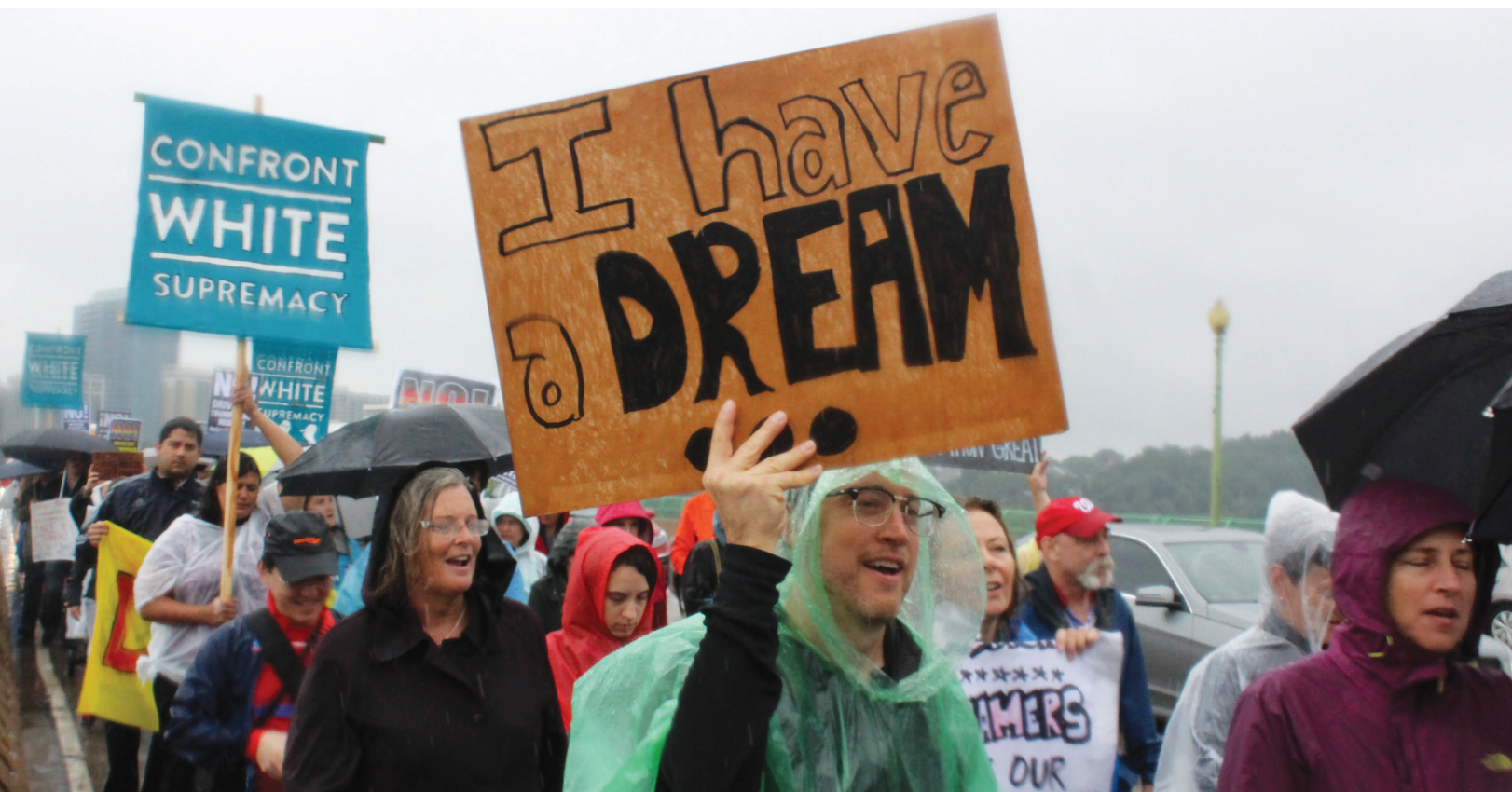
Virginia's legacy of racism will be acknowledged across the state in the coming years as the battle over names and statues will inevitably continue, as it has in Charlottesville. Murphy said there is no reasoning that can account for the level of hate still existing today.

"The excuses they use don't bear any relationship to the truth," Murphy said. "I want to know why they're so frightened of someone who is brown. We're all just people." ■

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