

STILLÉ

WEEKLY

Images from
a historic
three months
in Richmond.

Summer of Change

BY SCOTT ELMQUIST





Devin, 7, and Mah'Ki, 6, take a break from riding their bikes on the pedestal of the Robert E. Lee monument on June 6.

Photographer's Note: I just happened to stop by the monument one Saturday morning and saw the boys circling the pedestal on their bikes. They were doing some pretty radical moves for being so young. After I posted this image on Instagram, people commented that the boys compete in BMX races. They ride for the local team Rocket Racing. They are both 2019 state champions for their age groups. Devin is the 2019 Gold Cup champion in the regional competition for the southeastern United States. The boys' Instagram page, *bmx_bros_rva* replied to the *Style* photo: "Shredding For Justice!"

Transformative Times

Memorable images from a historic summer of protests that rocked Richmond.

by **Scott Elmquist**

In early July, Sue Morrow, the editor of *News Photographer* magazine, the official publication of the National Press Photographers Association, reached out and said she wanted to include one of my photographs in its July-August issue, which was focusing mostly on national protest coverage. The photograph is of young men playing basketball in front of the heavily graffitied Robert E. Lee monument.

"This photograph is one of the iconic ones of this time," she said.

Here's how I described the image, which graces *Style's* cover this week, in the *News Photographer* write-up:

"I had just come off a week of furlough

and was eager to begin documenting the protests again. That evening, there was a Juneteenth celebration happening at the Robert E. Lee Monument in Richmond, Virginia. The grounds of Lee Circle were busy. Most people were gathered on the south side of the monument listening to speakers. I left the crowd, circled the monument and saw the young boys playing pickup. Just then the sun peeked through the clouds and provided great evening light. The hoop was aligned perfectly with the heavily graffitied monument. I knew when I made this image I was witnessing a sea change in Richmond's history, as a young boy wearing an 'I Am My Ancestors' Wildest Dreams' shirt soared high on

one of the most hallowed grounds of Confederate legacy. Only a few years earlier, I had photographed hundreds of people in the exact same spot with Confederate flags, at a Sons of Confederate Veterans Heritage Rally, so I never thought I would see this moment."

The summer of change. Thousands of images of thousands of protesters. What makes an image resonate such as the photo of the young men playing basketball? How does a photographer make images that stand out? My best guess is persistence, familiarity with the subject, timing and a dose of luck.

I just kept going back day after day, week after week, just like several

On the cover: Melachi Cobbs flies high for the dunk at the Robert E. Lee monument on June 19.

extremely dedicated photojournalists in Richmond. Some days were dramatic, some weren't. But that's the key. You never know, so you gotta show up. There are so many moments from the summer that stick out, but a few stand out because they illustrate the humanity and dedication of Richmonders. Sometimes everything came together, other times it was when things fell apart.

On June 1 in front of City Hall, Black Lives Matter protesters were tear gassed by police. The crowd scattered and disappeared into the side streets. I had no idea if my press badge would keep me from getting arrested, since I was out past curfew. I huddled with 10 of so young protesters in a stairwell near the Valentine museum for several minutes. The protesters kept looking for an escape but kept coming back to the stairwell and soon, they were hiding in the bushes and gardens.

I finally had enough of hiding and sat on the steps of the Valentine. After a few minutes Valentine director Bill Martin pulled up in his Prius and asked what was going on. I filled him in on the situation and how the protesters feared being arrested. Martin said, 'let's get them inside.' Soon the protesters were sitting around a conference table drinking Cokes. Blue lights flashed continuously into the darkened Valentine windows as we watched protesters being arrested just outside. I asked Bill if he would consider talking to the police to see if they would let the protesters go. He said, "Sure, I'll use my white privilege to see what I can do."

A few minutes later he returned smiling and said if the protesters went out the side door and walked east, away from the city, they wouldn't be arrested. I joined them as they walked across the Martin Luther King Jr. Bridge toward Mosby Court. They were instantly on their phones making calls to get rides. Within 20 minutes a shiny pickup pulled up and we piled in. The driver maneuvered through back streets past police cars and dropped us off at various locations across the city. They dropped me near the Lee monument, saving me from walking about three miles because Uber wasn't picking up that night.

On June 30, I spent the night in my car, parked on Monument about 150 feet from the Stonewall Jackson statue. I texted back and forth with photographers Sandra Sellars and Regina Boone from the Richmond Free Press, who were also staking out the area. We had a tip that the Jackson statue was coming down that night, but as the first rays of light crept through the trees, no movement. Sellars and I shared a power bar on the sidewalk and tried to strategize. We agreed sleep was what we needed first. At around



Shirley A. Snead addressed a crowd at a grassroots rally for justice at the 17th Street Market on May 31. Nikon D850, 24-70 mm lens.

Photographer's Note: Snead struck a dramatic figure with the megaphone and American flag, but I found the buildings and power lines behind her distracting. I kept looking for the moment when all the elements came together. I like this image because of the drama she creates coupled with the fists of the crowd in the air. Nikon D850, Nikon 24-70 mm lens.



With fists raised during a moment of silence, protesters gathered around the Jefferson Davis monument on June 3.

Photographer's Note: Here I was trying to show the scope of the hundreds of people surrounding the monument and the juxtaposition of their arms raised in contrast to the former president of the Confederacy's arm, which is raised for starkly different reasons. One hundred thirteen years after the monument was erected and 155 since the end of the Civil War, the tide turned against the monuments in Richmond. Nikon D850, 24-70 mm lens.

STYLE WEEKLY

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noon I received a text that Jackson was coming down. I raced in from the West End in a panic and found parking just off Monument. The crowd swelled as workers prepped and secured the statue with a crane and heavy-duty straps. As they neared the moment when the statue, which stood at the intersection of Boulevard and Monument for 100 years, was to be removed, a torrential downpour cut loose. I had no protective rain gear since I left the house so quickly. The statue came down in a downpour and several photographers had cameras ruined. I lost one Nikon camera body and 80-200 mm lens. I was lucky. Some photographers had all their gear ruined by rain that seemed to never let up. But the photographers and crowd stayed even as lightning lit up the skies. As the statue came down, church bells rang out and applause erupted. History witnessed.

The images in the following pages represent a mix of protests from late May until late August, which adds up to around 100 days. Please also see this article online at styleweekly.com, where we showcase an additional 100 images to commemorate the summer of change, unrest and transformation.

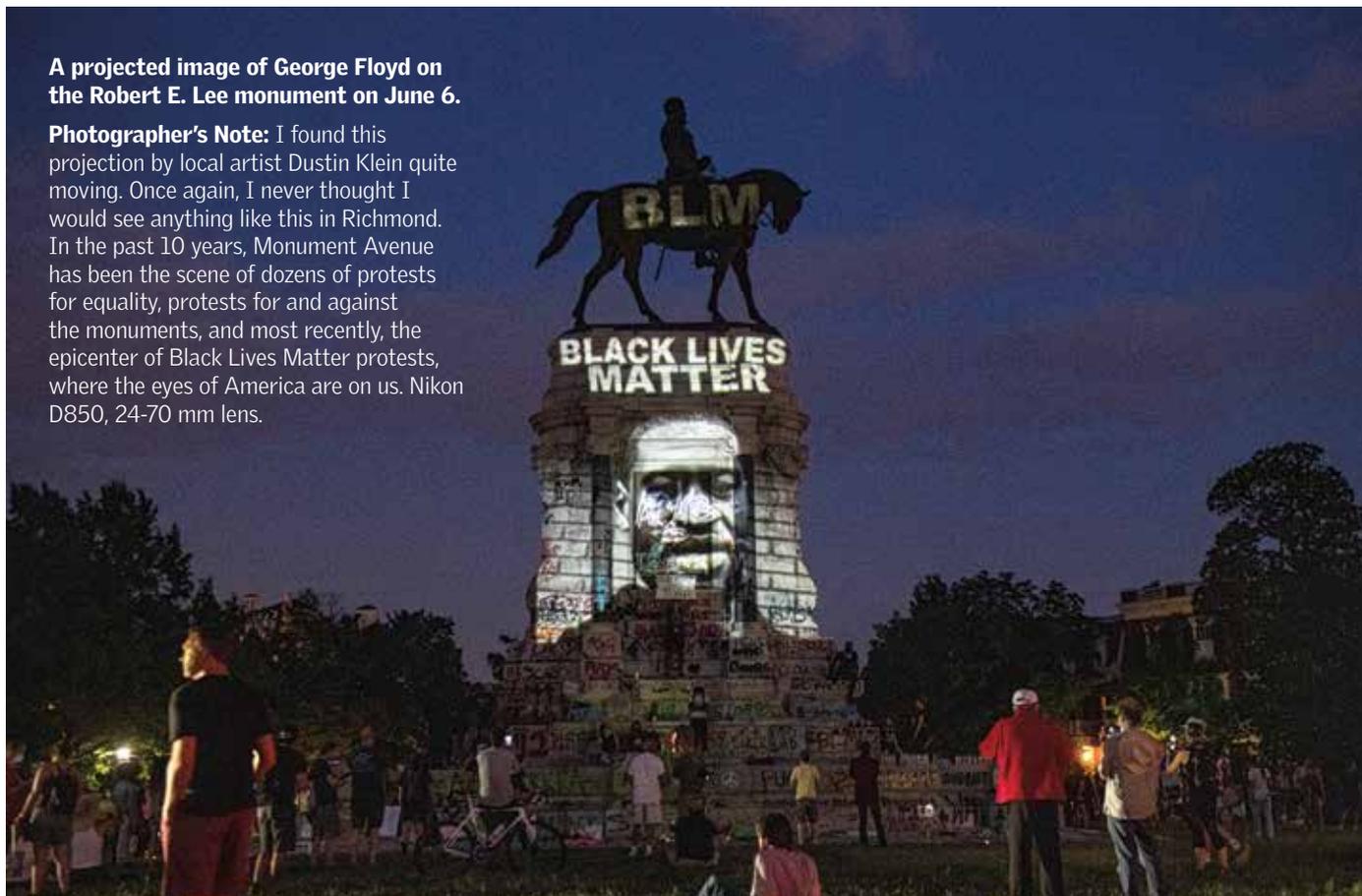


Militia members march across the lawn of the Science Museum of Virginia. They were on the grounds protesting against what they see as infringements of their Second Amendment rights. There was a special session of the legislative body being held at the museum on Aug. 18.

Photographer's Note: There were three protests going on simultaneously at the Science Museum on Aug. 18: protests against evictions, protests for more school funding and protests against Second Amendment measures passed by Virginia lawmakers. The scene was surreal because men with assault rifles were mingling with teachers and children as the protests shared the same ground. Canon EOS5D Mark III, 80-200 mm lens.

A projected image of George Floyd on the Robert E. Lee monument on June 6.

Photographer's Note: I found this projection by local artist Dustin Klein quite moving. Once again, I never thought I would see anything like this in Richmond. In the past 10 years, Monument Avenue has been the scene of dozens of protests for equality, protests for and against the monuments, and most recently, the epicenter of Black Lives Matter protests, where the eyes of America are on us. Nikon D850, 24-70 mm lens.





Lawrence Robinson recites lines from Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech at the Virginia Museum of History & Culture on Aug. 28. In commemoration of King's 1963 speech, around 200 people participated in a Unity Walk along Arthur Ashe Boulevard that culminated in several people reading excerpts from King's speech on the steps of the museum.

Photographer's Note: This event was well-thought-out and powerful. People from several ethnicities, young and old, recited lines from King's speech. The speakers also made pleas for unity and racial healing with specific ways to achieve those goals. One thing Robinson said stayed with me as I drove home: "Some of the protests have been misguided. Go to areas where people are affected. Go into Gilpin Court and talk to the people, they will talk back to you. Statues don't talk back." Canon EOS5D Mark III 80-200 mm lens.



The J.E.B. Stuart monument was removed from Monument Avenue on July 7. The statue was erected in 1907 and stood for 113 years.

Photographer's Note: This removal was quiet compared to Stonewall Jackson, with a much smaller crowd. The removal started much earlier in the day and workers cordoned off the area so no one could get near the statue. After the dramatic Jackson removal, Stuart seemed anti-climatic. I ended up in the wrong spot for the actual removal. The statue slowly spun away from me so I had to scramble. I think the best images of the day are when the statue was laying on its side with the graffitied pedestal in the background.

Thousands gathered at the Robert E. Lee monument on June 2 for the continuing protests of George Floyd's death.

Photographer's Note: I was standing at the edge of the crowd and shot this with my iPhone 8. *Style* readers loved this image on Instagram, with thousands reacting to it. Local photographer Greg Garner sent me this note on June 2: "Scott, this is such an incredible photo. I feel like this is one of the last photos that will be taken of the monument and it looks like Lee is leading the battle to get it taken down with everyone around fighting for change. Or it's like Lee's surrendering one last time. It's moving in so many ways. I want my city to heal and get rid of these symbols of hatred. But change is so incredibly hard. So glad you're out there getting these moments."

A young man raises his fist in the pouring rain just after the removal of the Stonewall Jackson statue July 1.

Photographer's Note: I was in complete disarray after covering this event. Both my cameras stopped working during the removal because of the rain and I resorted to using my iPhone at the very end. I was drenched and pretty distraught. I was convinced I had blown it. About a week after the removal I was going through my files and found this image. It captures the reality of the moment and the emotion. The reality is the driving rain and the emotion is the subject with his fist in the air, pistol tucked in his pants, defiantly joyous despite the downpour. The camera quit shortly after these few last frames and now it's permanently out of commission. Nikon D600, Nikon 24-70 mm lens.



The Vindicatrix was removed from the Jefferson Davis monument on July 8. The bronze statue, an emblem of Southern womanhood known as Miss Confederacy, stood atop the monument since 1907.

Photographer's Note: I found the ropes around her face striking and oddly fitting for the moment. It was as if she had been muzzled, her eyes lifted skyward and her weather hand outstretched for one last time. Canon EOS5D Mark III, Canon 80-200 mm lens.