**Daughters of Confederacy headquarters on fire, 2 Capitol Police offers injured as violence erupts during second night of protesting in Richmond**

A night after violent demonstrations gripped Richmond in the wake of the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, more unrest broke out Saturday evening.

The protests started peacefully Saturday night, with demonstrators gathered on a downtown street corner chanting as passing cars honked at them. But by 9:30 the scene had changed with protesters tossing garbage cans and water bottles and firing gunshots into the air as they marched through the city. Multiple windows were smashed along Broad Street.

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On Saturday morning, the streets of Richmond whirred with the sounds of city cleaning trucks as they rounded corners and pumped the brakes at each sighting of profanity toward police or "BLM" sprayed across government buildings, walls and storefronts after Friday night's protest in response to the death of Floyd in police custody in Minneapolis.

The cleaning trucks passed Belvidere Street, where a GRTC Pulse bus burned just hours before, and the corner of North Monroe and West Grace, where the vehicle on fire was a police car. VCU workers sprayed the university's Institute for Contemporary Art walls clean of "BLM" and a four-letter profanity, written just feet away from a "Solidarity is Essential" sign.

By Saturday evening, Richmond Police Department headquarters was boarded up with wooden panels fitted to conceal its windows, buses stopped running and Capitol Square was closed as cities across the U.S. braced for further protests .

Dozens of demonstrators stood peacefully Saturday evening at Belvidere and Broad streets, holding up signs that said "Love wins," "Black Lives Matter" and "Justice for George Floyd." Police watched nearby. The crowd began marching toward Monroe Park around 9 p.m.

Saturday morning, Mayor Levar Stoney addressed Friday night's protest - which RPD said had no arrests - and the violent injustices that continue to happen against black communities. Stoney told VPM that while he understands the outrage, those who are damaging black-owned businesses should stay home.

"What you're seeing around this country and saw in Richmond last night is built up pain. I feel that, and it hurts," Stoney later tweeted. "I know it could have been me or my brother. But two wrongs don't make a right. If you love this city, you'll express your pain without hurting others."

Richmond police said an officer suffered a minor injury during the protest Friday, but that they're not aware of anyone being arrested.

Police also said they are currently assessing the damage from the protests and contacting property owners.

One black-owned business impacted Friday night was Waller &amp; Company Jewelers, which has been in business off Broad Street for 120 years and had a window smashed in by a brick, according to surveillance cameras.

Another was Success Beaute Bar on West Grace Street, which hasn't yet celebrated a year, didn't qualify for federal paycheck protection loans and is waiting for the insurance company to open on Monday to assess the damage.

Owner Kurtshel Stroman said the windows were broken, four televisions were ripped off the wall and the front door taken down. This weekend would've been the first she could open following the pandemic, but now she's not sure when that will be.

"What statement are you making by breaking the windows of a black business, stealing from a black business? You can't make that statement that you're trying to make," she said. "We have people that are not even involved directly in the community that is affected who are coming in to do these loots and riots thinking that they are helping and they are hurting."

Stroman said she believes her salon was damaged because of its proximity to the police precinct. She said she supports peaceful protest and wishes these same efforts would go into advocating for policy change.

A GRTC Pulse bus was set on fire Friday night during the protest, but no employees or passengers were injured, according to a GRTC statement Saturday. GRTC also announced that it will suspend service from 8 p.m. Saturday to Sunday night.

"The safety of our staff and passengers is the most important factor in determining service levels. We can replace property, but we can't replace people," said GRTC CEO Julie Timm. "I also believe it is important for GRTC to make space for people to protest this weekend without endangering our GRTC family members. We are closely monitoring this evolving situation in Richmond and will only provide service when we determine it is safe."

GRTC plans to resume service Monday morning but may have service delays or end service following protests.

Capitol Square was closed to the public Saturday after Friday night's protest.

"The decision to keep Capitol Square closed was made after multiple surrounding buildings were damaged during civil unrest Friday," according to a statement from the Department of General Services and Capitol Police.

Damage mentioned included a window broken in the Barbara Johns Building and the vandalizing of the Virginia Capitol Visitor's Center, the Virginia Supreme Court Building and the Washington Building.

Capitol Square is usually closed from 11 p.m. until 6 a.m. A reopening date or time has not been disclosed.

Friday night's protest began around 8:30 p.m. and was in response to the ongoing police violence that has impacted black communities, including the death of Floyd, a black man who was killed after a white officer knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes.

Protesters in Richmond also paid tribute to Marcus-David Peters, a VCU alum who was killed by Richmond police officers in 2018 during a mental health crisis.

The Hanover NAACP announced a Call to Action Event on Sunday at 1 p.m. about the death of Floyd and other acts of violence at the hands of law enforcement. It will be held downtown at the Richmond Reconciliation Statue at 15th and East Main streets but is closed to the public.

Speakers include Stoney and the president of the Richmond Branch NAACP, the superintendent of Richmond Public Schools and the Richmond police chief, among others. The meeting will be streamed on Facebook Live.

An online flyer circulating Saturday called for a peaceful protest at 6 p.m. Monday starting at the Capitol.

Longtime organizer Iman Shabazz said these issues go beyond businesses being attacked or wanting police accountability. They're rooted in systemic oppression, he said.

"If we're not talking about providing resources, if you're not talking about the type of genuine and authentic inclusion, then I don't expect anything to happen," Shabazz said. Without it, he said, communities are waiting for the next "unfortunate, egregious" act to occur.

Some local organizers, such as Chelsea Higgs Wise, said the goal is to get the reform in policing they have worked toward for years, not just news conferences or statements.

In a Friday webinar made up of black activists, mental health advocates and social workers, they called for a civilian review board to hold police accountable in Richmond and establish the "Marcus Alert" in honor of Peters - the teacher who was fatally shot during a mental health crisis. The shooting was deemed justified by prosecutors.

Activists also asked for more transparency in how Richmond police conduct crisis intervention training and their de-escalation practices.

"The way to do that isn't by meeting at the reconciliation statue," Higgs Wise said. "It's by actually reconciling with these organizers you've been pushing off for years and sitting down and talking about what has to be done right now."

**Northam to take down Lee monument; Stoney wants other Confederate statues removed from Monument Avenue**

Growing demonstrations against racism and police brutality in Richmond have unfolded beneath the country's most iconic Confederate monuments.

Protesters decrying white supremacy have chanted for city leaders to tear them down.

Gov. Ralph Northam and Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney heeded their calls Wednesday.

Northam is poised to announce on Thursday plans to remove the statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee from Monument Avenue. Stoney said he wants four other famous statues honoring the Confederacy removed from the strip in the wake of Black Lives Matter protests that already have left an indelible mark on a changing city.

The news came on the sixth day of local demonstrations over the Minneapolis police killing of George Floyd, a 46-year-old African American man. The death has spurred nationwide protests over police violence targeting African Americans.

Locally, it also has reignited the push to remove Confederate iconography.

"I appreciate the recommendations of the Monument Avenue Commission - those were the appropriate recommendations at the time," Stoney said in a statement issued Wednesday afternoon, referencing a city panel that previously called for contextualizing most of the statues in place.

"But times have changed, and removing these statues will allow the healing process to begin for so many Black Richmonders and Virginians. Richmond is no longer the Capital of the Confederacy - it is filled with diversity and love for all - and we need to demonstrate that."

Shortly after Stoney made the announcement, news broke that Gov. Ralph Northam would detail plans Thursday to remove the Robert E. Lee monument, which the state owns. Earlier this week, Northam said he would "follow the lead of the City Council and ... the people that live in Richmond."

Northam will order the removal of the statue from its stone pedestal. The statue will be removed and stored while the administration makes a decision about its ultimate fate, with public input.

Protesters Wednesday night cheered news of the Lee monument's impending removal.

Removing the four locally controlled statues will require approval from the Richmond City Council. Stoney's ordinance said he and Councilman Michael Jones, a leading critic of the statues locally, will bring forward an ordinance to do that July 1.

A law set to take effect that day empowers local governments to take down Confederate monuments. Five stand on Monument Avenue. They depict Confederate Gens. Lee, J.E.B. Stuart and Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson; Confederate naval commander Matthew Fontaine Maury; and Confederate President Jefferson Davis.

State law requires localities to publish notice of their intent in a newspaper and hold a public hearing. It also permits localities to hold a nonbinding referendum regarding the monuments.

If the City Council votes to remove, relocate, contextualize, or cover the monuments, it must have a 30-day waiting period in which it offers to relocate the memorials to any museum, historical society or military battlefield, among others.

Richmond's council twice voted against requesting control of the statues from the state. It changed course earlier this year, after Democrats took control of the Virginia General Assembly.

Several council members said at the time they wanted to follow guidance from the city's Monument Avenue Commission. The panel recommended removing the Davis monument and various ways to "contextualize" the others.

While some on the council have signaled they are open to altering the statues, removal is a different question.

Monument Avenue is a National Historic Landmark. Residents have cited the designation to push back against efforts to alter the famous street or its towering monuments.

Councilwoman Kimberly Gray, a candidate for mayor who represents the area, has said in the past that she does not support spending tax dollars to remove the statues. She opposed two attempts to request control of the statues from the state. She did not return a request for comment Wednesday.

At the Lee monument Wednesday afternoon, Jones looked on as hundreds gathered there before marching through downtown. Jones has called the statues symbols of white supremacy and a source of pain for African Americans. He faced death threats for leading the push to request local control of them.

The events of the last week have made clear that the council must act, he said.

"We need to put pressure on the others on council to listen to this generation of people," he said in an interview Wednesday.

Two nights earlier, police fired tear gas on hundreds of protesters gathered peacefully at the Lee monument. Many stood with their hands raised above their heads. Police initially defended the show of force with a publicly issued lie.

Demonstrators and journalists circulated videos on social media contradicting the initial police account, prompting condemnation from leaders and a later apology.

Stoney and Police Chief Will Smith issued a public apology the next day and endured a tongue-lashing from angry residents and activists, who called for the firings of Smith, as well as the officers who launched the gas and targeted protesters with pepper spray.

Kaya Lee, 18, was standing with demonstrators when police fired the gas.

She returned Wednesday in cap and gown on what was her graduation day from Maggie L. Walker Governor's School. Holding a sign that read "I can't breathe" she posed for a photo with her mother, Mavis.

The statues should come down, but the graffiti should remain as a reminder of the demonstrations, Kaya Lee said.

Many messages written in paint on the monuments' use profanity to criticize the police. Alongside them, others espouse hope.

"This is for Marcus," read one, a reference to Marcus-David Peters, the black school teacher shot and killed by Richmond Police in 2018.

"I am not my ancestors," another proclaimed.

"Gods people shall rise."

Richmond's Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities is responsible for maintaining the city-controlled statues. A spokeswoman said the department had no timeline for cleaning graffiti off them and did not know how much it would cost.

Chris Morrison, a 38-year-old Hanover County resident, brought a bucket of water, dish soap and brushes to try scrubbing the graffiti from the Lee monument Wednesday.

He said he didn't want the profanities to remain plainly visible. Some demonstrators heckled him, but most ignored him, he said.

Morrison said he believed the monuments should remain.

"You learn from history, and they should not be removed," he said. "If you erase history, history can repeat itself."

After trying for a while, he couldn't scrub the graffiti from the pedestal. Instead, he found some chalk and began blotting out what messages he could. After a few hours, he decided to leave as demonstrators began gathering for another march.

Not long after Morrison gave up, Timesha Harris sat on the other side of the monument holding pink chalk. She drew an infinity symbol.

Asked what it represented to her, she said: "That this isn't going to stop until the government cares about us."

It was the first time the 19-year-old Prince George County resident had seen the monument.

In its current state, she said, it reminded her of the Berlin Wall.

**'This is the beginning, y'all': Marchers converge at Robert E. Lee statue as talks of monument removal escalate**

Nearly a thousand people converged at the Robert E. Lee monument Wednesday evening to celebrate after the city's mayor agreed with protesters that the monuments to Confederate leaders should come down.

History is being made, but the work is not yet done, said Ashley Roye.

"The removal of the statue doesn't mean anything until we see change," she said. "A change in behavior, in what's put back into our communities. This country was built on our backs. We are disparaged."

Other demonstrators said the city can't ignore how many black people continue to be imprisoned, and how police brutality predominantly impacts black communities; a statistic Dwight Gaines has become too familiar with. He lost his cousin to police violence in Washington, D.C., a few years ago.

"This is a revolution," Gaines said. "We need every person in this fight, and whether I know them or not, we're all affected."

Even as they celebrated, event organizers and participants reminded the group to expand their activism and continue advocating for social justice causes, citing the importance of protecting black transgender lives and black women. They spoke of Breonna Taylor, who was killed by police officers in Louisville, Ky., and Tony McDade, a black trans man who was killed in Tallahassee. No police officers have been charged in either case.

Carlton Webb, an organizer with the Richmond Transparency Accountability Project, said removing the monuments is a step forward but not sufficient.

"This was embedded in this society for one reason: to continue the narrative and to show their control over us. It should have been done 50 years ago," he said. "A lot of people have given lip service and a lot of politicians do. The only way they do what they say is if we make them. Nothing happens without us at the table."

As protesters celebrated Wednesday, state Sen. Amanda Chase, R-Chesterfield and a candidate for governor, started a petition to save the Lee statue. "They must be stopped," the petition says.

"Northam is giving into looters and domestic terrorists instead of defending the historical monuments owned by all Virginians," the petition continues.

Two protest onlookers who live on Monument Avenue, Don and Nancy Baker, disagreed. The two have lived in the same house on the street for 35 years, and were shocked to learn of Northam's plans.

A sign in their yard reads: "Take them down."

"We've been wanting that to happen for years," said Don Baker, the former Richmond bureau chief for the Washington Post. "It's not a tribute to these guys. It's a tribute to slavery and to Jim Crow. They say it's history, but it's bad history. It's nothing to be proud of and it's not going to hurt the neighborhood once they're down. They'll figure out something else to put up."

Richmond leaders until Wednesday had not committed to a course of action involving the four Confederate monuments that the city soon will have the local authority to control; a power bestowed on localities by a new Democratic majority in the state legislature. The City Council still must approve the measure for action to occur.

The administration of Mayor Levar Stoney introduced an ordinance, in tandem with City Councilman Michael Jones, to remove city-controlled monuments come July 1.

Wednesday night's protests were organized by members of the 381 Movement. Those in charge declined to identify themselves, but said they want to see change in Richmond. They plan to march and protest for 381 days; the same amount of time as the Montgomery Bus Boycotts organized by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

"This is the beginning, y'all," an organizer said.

**Northam orders Lee statue to be removed 'as soon as possible'; Stoney says 'It's time'**

In a rebuke of Confederate glorification, Gov. Ralph Northam on Thursday called for the swift removal of a bronze statue depicting Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee from Richmond's Monument Avenue, a response to recent local and nationwide protests over systemic racism and police brutality.

"When it's the biggest thing around, it sends a clear message: This is what we value the most. That's just not true anymore," Northam said during a news conference in Richmond, the former capital of the Confederacy. "In Virginia, we no longer preach a false version of history, one that pretends the Civil War was about state's rights, and not the evil of slavery. No one believes that any longer."

Northam's decision followed an announcement by Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney, who said Wednesday that city leaders would seek to remove four other Confederate statues from Monument Avenue. Those depict Gens. J.E.B. Stuart and Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson; Confederate naval commander Matthew Fontaine Maury; and Confederate President Jefferson Davis.

"It's time. It's time to put an end to the 'Lost Cause' and fully embrace the righteous cause. It's time to replace the racist symbols of oppression and inequality … with symbols that summon the best in all of us," Stoney said at Thursday's news conference, flanked by other state leaders, black activists and even a descendant of Lee.

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The decisions were announced on the seventh day of protests in Richmond, some peaceful and others violent, fueled by the killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer. In Richmond and around the country, protesters have called for reforms to the criminal justice system and for an end to excessive use of force by police, particularly toward black men.

Those demands brought protesters to the foot of Richmond's Confederate monuments, which were heavily tagged with profanity toward police, calls for racial justice and Floyd's name. Nearby, protesters set fire to the headquarters of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, which bore similar graffiti across its front walls.

The displays reignited a debate over Confederate iconography - one that has been long-standing in Virginia, and that reached a boiling point with the 2017 white supremacist rally in Charlottesville.

The Rev. Robert W. Lee IV, a descendant of the Confederate general, spoke from the steps of the monument in support of its removal Thursday. He called the monument an "idol of white supremacy."

"There are members in my family who are shaking in their boots. I'm sure my ancestor Robert E. Lee is rolling in his grave, and I say, let him roll," Lee said to a crowd of about 200 people, which included at least two people in opposition of the removal.

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Elsewhere, Senate GOP leaders, led by Minority Leader Tommy Norment, R-James City, opposed the decision.

"Attempts to eradicate instead of contextualizing history invariably fail. ... [Northam's] decision is more likely to further divide, not unite, Virginians," the caucus said in a statement.

Sen. Amanda Chase, R-Chesterfield, who is not part of the GOP caucus, said the decision to remove the Lee statue is an attempt at "revising history" and "erasing the history of the white people." Chase started a petition to oppose the removal on the website of her campaign for governor.

The House GOP caucus did not issue a statement on the matter. On Wednesday, Minority Leader Todd Gilbert said the removal decision was made to "change the subject" from the tear-gassing of peaceful protesters by Richmond police on Monday, from Northam's failure to denounce looters.

Robert W. Lee is a pastor at Unifour Church in Newton, N.C. He was among a group that flanked Northam and Stoney at Thursday's formal announcement, which also included Robert Johns, a descendant of Barbara Johns, who protested school segregation; Lt. Gov. Justin Fairfax, who is African American; and a student from Charlottesville, Zyahna Bryant.

In 2016, at age 15, Bryant started a petition to remove Charlottesville's Lee statue. On Thursday, Bryant didn't talk about the monument's removal; instead, she called for the dismantling of systemic and interpersonal racism.

"I want to be clear: There will be no healing or reconciliation until we have equity, until we have fully dismantled the systems that oppress black and brown people."

She urged the public to have "tough conversations" about racism, even if it causes "controversy" or "inconvenience."

Similarly, Fairfax praised the statue's removal, calling it a "down payment on the promise to the people of Virginia and all over America." He likened racial inequity in the state to monuments to the Confederacy.

He said those Confederate monuments include substandard schools, health care, housing and the criminal justice system, which he said disproportionately yield worse outcomes for black people in Virginia.

Pressed by a reporter on "concrete" plans to address police brutality, Northam said the way forward will include diversifying the police force, increasing positive relations between civilians and police, and improving police training on de-escalation. Northam did not directly point to legislation or executive policy changes.

Removal of the Lee monument, which is the only one on Monument Avenue controlled by the state, has weighed on Northam since the start of his administration. (The rest of the statues on Monument Avenue were controlled by the legislature, which in the spring shifted power to localities.)

In the aftermath of the white supremacist rally in Charlottesville in 2017, during his campaign for governor, Northam said Confederate statues "should be taken down and moved into museums."

Northam had so far declined to make a decision on the statue, but this past spring, he signed legislation allowing localities to decide the fate of Confederate memorials controlled by their localities. That bill will allow Richmond to move on the four statues on Monument Avenue, and would allow the city of Charlottesville to similarly remove the Lee statue in its downtown.

As for Richmond's Lee statue, the bronze portion will be removed and stored in a warehouse while the administration makes a decision about its ultimate fate, with public input.

The fate of the stone pedestal it sits on, and the graffiti that now covers it, is the subject of ongoing discussions, Northam said.

The administration did not share a timeline for when the bronze statue of Lee would be removed. A spokeswoman for the Department of General Services, which will oversee the task, said the work will require "careful planning" due to the size, scale and location.

"DGS is taking steps to carry out this order as soon as possible," spokeswoman Dena Potter said.

The 14-foot bronze statue was unveiled in Richmond on May 29, 1890, 25 years after the end of the Civil War. The statue has become a part of both the state and federal registers of historic landmarks.

Rita Davis, the Northam administration's legal counsel, said the registers are both voluntary, allowing the owner, in this case the state, to remove or dispose of the landmark as they please.

Davis said Virginia law also explicitly allows the governor to move any state-controlled piece of art, which includes monuments. Davis said she has consulted the leader of the state's historic registry but has not communicated with federal officials.

Still, the decision could prompt legal challenges.

The Monument Avenue Preservation Group, a network of supporters of the avenue's statues, said Thursday that the governor's "illegal action is being actively researched."

Asked if the administration was aware of any legal challenges, and if it was prepared to defend its decision, Davis said: "No, and absolutely."

**A painful week pushed Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney toward a historic decision**

Levar Stoney's hands shook as he tried to steady the megaphone.

Facing a charged crowd of more than 1,500 on the steps of City Hall, Richmond's black mayor tried to atone for why his police force had fired tear gas on Black Lives Matter protesters standing with their hands raised beneath the Robert E. Lee monument a night earlier.

After emerging to a chorus of boos, he tried to relay the apology he had rehearsed. Jeers drowned him out. Some sought to quiet the crowd to give him a few minutes to speak. Others had already heard enough.

"Yesterday we violated [the social] contract," he said, to shouts of "Yes you did!" A woman grabbed another megaphone and screamed for resignations. Others shouted profanities. An 8-year-old girl who wanted to talk said she was afraid to speak up (she did).

What he thought would be a public apology became a public reckoning for Stoney, a Democrat with well-publicized ambition for higher office who's up for re-election in November. A confrontation that could have derailed his political career set in motion a historic decision he would announce a day later.

At a point he looked down to see wet clumps spilling out of a brown bag labeled "BAG of SHIT for BAGS of SHIT," tossed within inches of his navy blue sneakers.

Words had failed him. They wouldn't be enough, he told the crowd.

Then what will you do, they demanded.

After facing them for an hour, he ducked back into City Hall and broke down.

Later that night, he marched with protesters to the Lee monument - his first visit there, he said - a gesture meant to demonstrate his solidarity with demonstrators. It did little to appease some he marched alongside. They booed him as he left.

Back home that night after one of the most painful days of his term, he realized he had to embrace his emotions instead of fighting to control them. More tears had followed his encounter with Lee.

"The reason I cried, the reason I became emotional was the pain that I felt out there was more than just - as a collection of grief, I thought, that is more than just police brutality," Stoney said in a brief interview on Friday. "It's racism, it's injustices. Folks who feel like people have been marginalized for too long."

The uprising over systemic racism and policing landed on Richmond's streets in what already had been a trying year. In the midst of a pandemic that's spotlighted the city's disparities, Stoney still is recovering from the failed Navy Hill downtown redevelopment bid, targeted by activists and ultimately torpedoed by the City Council.

On Tuesday, when he leaned into his personal experience as a 39-year-old black man who understands racism, the crowd outside of City Hall shouted him down.

"You're not saying anything and that's why we're not listening. We want actions. We want concrete actions," Princess Blanding, sister of Marcus-David Peters, who was killed by a Richmond police officer while in mental health crisis two years ago, said into a microphone. "We don't trust you."

The crowd cheered wildly as she held eye contact with him while he stood quietly two feet away.

Within 48 hours, even his fiercest rivals had conceded that his call for removing the four city-controlled statues on Monument Avenue was right for Richmond; a breakneck turnaround in a dizzying week that had challenged his political future.

"I know that as my job I'm the face of local government here," he said in an interview Friday, of facing the crowd. "I think folks were just fed up with government in general, I mean, all levels, and I happened to be the closest person to them. And sometimes you have to put yourself out there to get knocked down a little bit, and I'm willing to do that for my city."

Instead of retreating, he accepted an invitation to join marchers, and ultimately embraced activists' demands, including an alert named for Peters that would tap mental health professionals as the first responders for people in mental health crises, not police.

He also is establishing an independent civilian review board to oversee Richmond police. The department is now facing a federal lawsuit over the tear gassing incident and has yet to detail a review or disciplinary actions Chief William Smith on Monday said were being considered.

Friday afternoon, he said the week had "put a mirror in front of us and we have to ask ourselves: 'Do we approve of the image that has been reflected back?'"

Although Stoney has said he personally believes the monuments should come down, his administration has not pursued that course aggressively before this week.

In 2017, after the deadly white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, he seated a panel of historians, preservationists and others to chart a course on the long divisive issue. That panel said the following year the Jefferson Davis statue should come down, but the city should add context to the others.

As for the state-owned Lee statue, it was out of the city's hands.

Stoney said he's jogged and driven by the statues but never stood to face the 60-foot-tall tribute to Lee, whose own descendant said in public remarks Thursday was an "idol of white supremacy."

"When you are in its presence and you look straight up it is daunting, it's intimidating. That struck me," Stoney said. "I'd never done that, but why would I? I'm a black man. Why would I go to see a Confederate monument?"

Stoney said he struggled Tuesday night to explain to protesters why the city couldn't take immediate action, a concern he relayed that evening in a Facebook Live event hosted by the Metropolitan African American Baptist Church.

"They don't recognize the systems in which we work, that there's a process to everything we do," a visibly tired Stoney said in a split-screen with pastors and other local officials. "Frankly, they want action today, they want action now. And as we all know as students of government is that it doesn't work that way. It just does not work that way. We don't get change tomorrow."

But Richmond could have it, beginning July 1, thanks to a bill passed by the newly Democratic-controlled legislature that hands control of war memorials over to localities. All nine members of the City Council said they would support his call for removal following the events of the last week.

Gov. Ralph Northam on Thursday ordered the state-controlled Lee statue removed from Monument Avenue within weeks.

Stoney wasn't sure whose decision came first but said he hadn't run his Wednesday removal announcement past Northam.

"I don't know if they let us know first and didn't know what our thinking was," Stoney said. "My chief of staff was talking to his chief of staff."

At the official announcement Thursday, Stoney said tears rolled quietly behind his face mask. He and Northam expanded on the decision to take down the statues, now covered in graffiti from protesters demanding police accountability and calling for an end to systemic racism.

He declined to detail any threats related to the announcement but said he's been inundated with support from family and from friends of all racial and political backgrounds, saying "number one what you did on Tuesday was courageous, but I could not be more proud of my city and my leadership in my city after the [Monuments] decision."

"When they are removed it will be a watershed moment," Stoney said. "Not just in Richmond history but in American history."

**'I don't think things are going to be the same': Civil rights leaders Wilder, Hill Jr., Marsh, Reid reflect on this week**

Oliver Hill Jr. is a psychologist, a student of comparative history, and the son of a civil rights icon.

Hill watched it all come together in the streets of Richmond in the past week. Public revulsion over the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis prompted demonstrations that he said brought Virginia to "a tipping point" in the long struggle of African Americans for civil rights in the shadow of Confederate statues they see as symbols of white supremacy and distorted history.

No longer.

The statues of Confederate leaders will come down, beginning with the most imposing of them all - Gen. Robert E. Lee, astride his horse high above the city streets since its unveiling almost exactly 130 years ago. Four others are poised to follow under a new state law and city commitment to remove them.

"I think it's long overdue," said Hill, whose father, attorney Oliver Hill Sr., played a pivotal role in legal desegregation of public schools across the United States. "You could almost feel a shift in the collective ethos in the city about these issues."

The demonstrations over the slow-motion death of a black man under the knee of a white police officer in Minneapolis played out in Richmond and other communities across the country already gripped by a coronavirus pandemic that has disproportionately affected African Americans and Hispanics.

But in Richmond, the demonstrations played out primarily on the city's grandest street, lined with statues erected to celebrate the Confederate cause long after the Civil War had ended. An epoch that began at the end of the 19th century came to a sudden reckoning in the 21st century.

"It's going to move swiftly now," predicted Dr. W. Ferguson Reid, the first African American elected to the Virginia General Assembly since the end of Reconstruction after the Civil War.

"You have to reach what I call critical mass," said Reid, 95, who was first elected in 1968 and re-elected twice to a multijurisdictional seat in the Richmond area. "Once it meets that critical mass, it explodes."

However, Reid and other lions of the civil rights era say the toppling of monuments isn't the real work that Virginians of all races and ethnicity must do, especially with the continuing threat of the coronavirus to people's lives and livelihoods.

"This is no damn time for me to be happy," said former Gov. L. Douglas Wilder, the first African American elected governor in the country's history. "I don't believe in symbolism as such. I believe in the real deal."

For Wilder, who served one term as Richmond's popularly elected mayor, the real issues are "the lack of education and ... the continuing lack of justice in this country."

"I haven't called for any of [the statues] to be removed," he said. "I called for education."

Wilder recalled opposition, from both white and black leaders, to his proposal to erect a monument to Arthur Ashe on Monument Avenue in 1996, three years after the Richmond-born tennis champion and humanitarian died of a different deadly virus, AIDS.

When he was governor, Wilder had Ashe's body laid in state in the Executive Mansion, where Confederate Gen. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson had been mourned similarly after his death during the war in 1863.

Wilder also led the effort to make the birthday of civil rights leader the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. a state holiday and eliminate "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny" as the state song, but he faults leaders of both races for failing to improve education and other opportunities for African Americans.

"It is a teachable moment, but who's going to teach it?" he asked.

Former Sen. Henry Marsh, D-Richmond, said he had similar priorities after he was elected as Richmond's first black mayor in 1977.

Marsh said he and the majority-black council laughed when they found out about what he described as a secret effort by white members of the General Assembly to block any attempts to remove the Confederate monuments on Monument Avenue.

"To think that our priority for Richmond was removing the statues!" he said with a chuckle. "We were concerned about segregation of the schools. We were concerned about jobs."

But the Confederate monuments still bothered him and other civil rights leaders who had grown up in their shadows.

"Those were definitely message statues," Hill said.

The message, articulated by Gov. Ralph Northam in a speech last week to announce the removal of the Lee statue from state-owned property on Monument Avenue, was that the monuments were erected during the Jim Crow era as the state passed laws to subjugate blacks and to deny them rights to vote and use the same public facilities as white Virginians.

"The message was clearly a message of white supremacy," Hill said. "It was a given. It didn't have to be overt."

He was among the first students to integrate Richmond public schools as a 12-year-old in 1961. He was surprised by a different version of history taught in white schools than what he had learned in the black community.

"I was literally shocked at the stories they were telling about the happy black slaves," Hill said.

Those stories were part of the history represented by the Confederate statues on Monument Avenue.

Reid said the statues went up on Monument "to make it clear, 'we're still in charge, and don't you ever forget it.'"

He doesn't want the bronze statues melted. He wants them to be used to educate.

"You do with the monuments the same things you did with the dinosaurs - you put them in museums," Reid said.

However, Wilder offered a pointed reminder to Northam that other monuments to Lee and Confederate leaders remain in the state Capitol, where the moment that Lee accepted command of the Army of Northern Virginia is commemorated with a bronze, life-sized statue in the Old House of Delegates Chamber.

"You get to say about what happens out on the street," Wilder said of the governor. "What do you say about where the laws are made?"

And there is also the Capitol Square statue of former U.S. Sen. Harry F. Byrd Sr., a segregationist Democrat who led the Massive Resistance effort to close public schools rather than allow them to be racially integrated after the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kan., decision that Oliver Hill Sr. helped win at the U.S. Supreme Court in 1954.

Del. Jay Jones, D-Norfolk, and other House Democrats are already talking about legislation to remove Byrd's statue from the Capitol grounds.

First, however, Reid said the state must pursue the larger goals of the public protests that shook Virginia in the past 10 days.

"You need the protests and you need the political action both," he said. "They have to follow it up with political actions and come up with solutions."

Police reforms are at the top of the list after the public spectacle of Floyd's death on Memorial Day.

"We've had [police] killings before, but none as visible to so many people, none as excruciatingly hard to watch," said Marsh, who practiced law with Oliver Hill Sr. and civil rights lawyer Samuel Tucker. "I just had to cry when I looked at it."

He commended the racially diverse protests, which he described as "peaceful, for the most part," despite violence, looting and burning in parts of downtown Richmond last weekend.

"You'll always have some people who take advantage of a peaceful demonstration," he said. "Some of them don't know any better. Some of them deliberately do it."

On Monday, the night before Northam made the decision to remove the Lee statue, Richmond police fired tear gas to disperse a peaceful protest around the statue shortly before a city curfew was to take effect. Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney and Police Chief William Smith publicly apologized the next day, and the mayor announced his proposal to remove four Confederate statues from city property on Monument Avenue.

"It was a turning point," Hill said.

Hill and Marsh say they believe the dramatic events of last week will lead to real progress in protecting civil rights.

"My father was always optimistic," Hill said. "He was a believer in the power of the law and holding people accountable to the power of the law.

"Sometimes progress is slow, but sometimes it arrives quickly in ways you didn't anticipate," he said.

Marsh said, "I don't think things are going to be the same."

**By the numbers: Virginia has the most Confederate monuments, flags and other symbols in the nation**

Monuments. Streets. Schools.

Confederate iconography remains throughout Virginia and in Richmond, the former capital of the Confederacy. Virginia's 244 Confederate symbols are the most in the nation, according to a study by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

As protesters continue to rally against police brutality in the wake of George Floyd's death, they're also calling for racial justice. Part of that message is for Confederate monuments to come down.

Elected officials have pledged to take down some of the monuments, but last week saw many toppled or damaged. A pair of Confederate monuments in Richmond have been torn down. In Portsmouth, protesters beheaded four statues.

Gov. Ralph Northam announced June 4 that he was directing the Department of General Services to remove the Robert E. Lee statue from Richmond's Monument Avenue, the most well-known Confederate tribute in the state. The statue's removal is now in a court fight, with a Richmond judge last week granting a temporary injunction to keep it in place. The injunction lifts Thursday.

The other monuments in Richmond will soon be in the city's control, with a new state law allowing local governing bodies to take down the memorials. Every member of the Richmond City Council has voiced support for their removal.

Northam and Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney have asked people to consider the risk of injury and allow the monuments to be removed professionally.

There are nearly 20 tributes to the Confederacy in Richmond, according to 2019 data from the Southern Poverty Law Center. Across Virginia, there are more than 200.

What to do with those tributes has been a matter of debate for decades.

Proponents of removal say the monuments and other symbols were erected, as Northam's legal counsel Rita Davis said last week, to "fit a narrative that minimized a devastating evil perpetrated on African Americans during the darkest part of our past." Opponents, however, say taking them down erases history.

"The Governor's decision to remove the Lee statue from Monument Avenue is not in the best interests of Virginia," Senate Republican Caucus leaders said when Northam made his announcement. "Attempts to eradicate instead of contextualizing history invariably fail."

The symbols are facing a reckoning as protesters continue to hold rallies around them, call for removal and in some cases pull them down.

"It's time. These statues are not just reminders of a painful past, but symbols of a painful present and even harbingers of a difficult future," Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., said in a statement. "The Governor's action answers a question: Why glorify those who fought to keep people in bondage because of the color of their skin?"

Kaine supports changing the name of Confederate Avenue, the Richmond street where he lives.

Here are more statistics from the SPLC that show the Confederacy's prominence in Virginia:

110

Nearly half of the Confederate tributes are monuments. Robert E. Lee's five monuments are the most of an individual leader, followed by Stonewall Jackson (4) and Jefferson Davis (3). The Southern Poverty Law Center data was last updated in July 2019 and does not include the monuments recently torn down, including the Davis statue on Monument Avenue in Richmond.

41

Robert E. Lee, who was born in Stratford and died in Lexington, is the most honored Confederate leader in Virginia. He's followed by 22 public symbols for Stonewall Jackson, another Virginian, and 19 for J.E.B. Stuart. Ninety-two Confederate symbols have no specific honoree.

14

Fourteen schools in the state remain named for Confederate leaders. Richmond recently renamed J.E.B. Stuart Elementary for former President Barack Obama, and the city school system has pledged action on others, including Binford Middle and John B. Cary Elementary. Other school districts have decided to keep Confederate school names and mascots, most notably Hanover County Public Schools, which is facing an appeal in a lawsuit over the names of Lee-Davis High and Stonewall Jackson Middle.

18

Virginia has removed 18 Confederate symbols, including renaming 10 schools, since the 2015 shooting in which a white man killed nine black people during a Bible study in Charleston, S.C. Across the country, 123 symbols have been removed.

3

Military installations named for Confederate leaders have gained renewed attention after President Donald Trump said his administration would not consider renaming them. Virginia, where much of the Civil War was fought, has three such stations.

Fort A.P. Hill in Bowling Green honors the Confederate lieutenant general, while Fort Lee near Petersburg is named for Robert E. Lee. The third, Fort Pickett in Nottoway County, pays tribute to Confederate Gen. George Pickett.

1

Virginia has one holiday, Lee-Jackson Day, that honors the Confederacy. Democrats in the General Assembly this year decided to remove the holiday, effective July 1, in favor of making Election Day a state holiday. Virginia had marked a state holiday for Lee's birthday since 1889. It added Stonewall Jackson to the Lee holiday in the early 1900s. After more than a dozen years of it being merged with Martin Luther King Jr. Day - it was called Lee-Jackson-King Day - the state split them into separate holidays in 2000.

**"Here we are today, still fighting:" what a Fourth of July in the middle of a racial reckoning looked like in Richmond**

Erica Swann's 5-year-old hand gripped her father's finger as she squinted at the photo of a Black teenager stationed around the Robert E. Lee monument.

"This is Trayvon Martin," Eli Swann said. "A bad person sent him to heaven over a bag of candy."

She nodded, pulling on her pigtails as her glittery T-shirt that said "Glam Start-Up Kit" glimmered in the Saturday sun. Even as Fourth of July celebrations went on throughout the country, leaving behind a wake of fireworks and barbecue grilling, the U.S. continues to grapple with its racial reckoning.

And one day, he said, that will affect his little girl.

Richmond itself is in its 37th day of protests, part of the nationwide outcry against police violence that's seen Confederate monuments toppled and various police departments, not including Richmond, defunded.

A "Free the People" car rally, made up of more than 40 vehicles, protested against mass incarceration, evictions, white supremacy and more Saturday evening outside of the Richmond City Justice Center. A parade honoring Black joy took place shortly after at the Market @ 25th, where dozens marched to demand a civilian review board with subpoena power; for the names of Richmond police officers under use-of-force investigations to be released; to defund the police and allocate that money toward Black communities; establish a civilian review board with subpoena power; drop protesters' charges; and remove all monuments to white supremacy.

But with the minor victories - the ongoing removal of Confederate monuments among them - comes the reminder that a pandemic rages on, evidenced by the surplus of masks covering faces Saturday. And it's one Black and Hispanic people currently endure the brunt of while they march against an unjust system.

"Here we are today, still fighting and that's prevalent to what Fourth of July means. We're still different," said Swann, who's lived in Richmond the past 24 years. "Fighting for Africans to be free, not so much from chains but mentally and spiritually."

Yet for the first time since he can remember, Swann, 48, feels an unaccustomed sense of hope that the U.S. could right itself and push forward - that change is coming.

He walked toward the shaded tent that's offered reprieve from the simmering heat this past month and where he's built a community who registers people to vote. As of Saturday, they've reached more than 300 people, the bulk of whom Swann said would be first-time voters.

The tent at the left side of the Confederate horse, one of many wrapping the graffitied Lee monument, has amassed various donations of food, snacks and water to hand out to protesters and people lounging. For Ida Allen, whose days start at 7 a.m. to set up, being part of this gathering was a way to be involved in the movement without risking re-traumatizing herself by marching. The first few nights of protests, she was tear gassed by police multiple times, Allen said. She's not sure she can face that again.

"It's a family out here," Allen said, and it's one that's helped her heal, she added.

The experience has spurred her to start Richmond Action Alliance, a nonprofit focused on voter registration, talks of racial justice and bridging local government with the community. This movement is a conversation starter, said Allen, and one that will turn loss into celebration.

Her partner Crystal Suber agreed and looked toward the monument, a symbol that once revered a Confederate general now wrapped in condemnations against police and white supremacy. She remembers marching for Travyon Martin in Washington after he was killed and shook her head. That was just eight years ago.

"Everything that's going on is forcing this country to recognize history," Suber said, clarifying that her real Fourth of July is Juneteenth, the commemoration of the last enslaved people in the South finding out about the Emancipation Proclamation. "People say this is dividing us but a lot of this has brought us together … and it's been beautiful."

The barricades, now completely filled with art that urges peace and the defunding of police, created a protective perimeter for families gathered around with their kids, who spent their holiday dancing and whirling at the base of the statue. People grilled and offered free food to passersby as music lifting up Black artists reverberated through Monument Avenue, which once barred Black people from purchasing homes. Protester-made crosswalks lined the north and south side of the circle with added ramps for wheelchair accessibility.

A family of six hung around on the steps, with a pair of twins in matching tees playing around as the father explained why they're here, and how they're witnessing the world change before them, just as Swann did with his daughter moments prior.

One daughter grabbed one sliver of chalk from the ground vigorously, scribbling on the top of the stairs next to her sisters before standing up and grinning at her masterpiece, now etched onto history. She looked up at her father, then back out onto the circle renamed in honor of Marcus-David Peters and, slowly, put her fist in the air.

**After 100 years, Stonewall Jackson statue taken down**

Cast in bronze astride a horse, the statue of Confederate Gen. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson had towered over Monument Avenue for a century.

No longer.

To cheers, a crew of workers dispatched by Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney on Wednesday hoisted the 6-ton statue from its pedestal. More than 1,000 people at the intersection of Monument Avenue and Arthur Ashe Boulevard waited for hours, braving lightning and a downpour to witness the historic moment.

"Frankly, it's time to heal," Stoney said hours earlier, as he lobbied the City Council to back the immediate removal of all of Richmond's Confederate monuments.

After a calamitous month, it was a moment of catharsis for residents who have long called for the monuments to come down.

"Anybody that takes the time to examine the history of Richmond and Monument Avenue would probably agree that these were put here to help to sell a segregated community," said Daniel Farren, who came to see the removal. "This should've happened a long time ago."

"Surreal" was the word Ana Edwards used to describe the moment.

"We actually didn't think we would see them come down," said Edwards, chair of the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project of the Virginia Defenders for Justice, Freedom and Equality. "We didn't think we would get to a place where they would actually come down. This is the culmination of decades of frustration of Richmonders, of having to tolerate [the monuments'] existence."

As significant as the removal was, Edwards said crucial work remained to undo the systemic racism represented by the statues. She cited a wave of pending eviction cases against city residents in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. Protesters were arrested at the Richmond courthouse hours before the crane lifted Jackson from his pedestal.

"Taking the statues down is a part of the process, but we have to do the real work," she said.

Protests against police brutality and racism have gripped the city for 4½ weeks since the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police. Daily demonstrations in Richmond increasingly centered on Monument Avenue, home to the country's most prominent statues honoring Confederate leaders in what is the former capital of the Confederacy.

Protesters decried the monuments as emblems of white supremacy and the racism that is foundational to life in America. They demanded that city leaders tear them down.

What had been a perennial debate in the city quickly gave way to political consensus among elected officials. Stoney pledged to take the monuments down, and all nine City Council members said they would support doing so when a new state law took effect July 1.

In the meantime, protesters took matters into their own hands, toppling several smaller tributes to the Confederacy and pulling down the statue to Confederate President Jefferson Davis on Monument Avenue. Last week, they tried to pull down the statue depicting Confederate Gen. J.E.B. Stuart before Richmond police declared an unlawful assembly and launched tear gas.

In the aftermath of that incident, some on the City Council called for immediate removal of the statues, fearing injuries or an accidental death.

Last month, a man was seriously injured as protesters in Portsmouth sought to topple a statue there. The incident prompted Norfolk to accelerate its plans to take down a Confederate statue on public display.

The new state law requires an administrative process of at least 60 days for a locality to remove its statues. However, Stoney said Wednesday that the monuments had become threats to public safety.

Bucking advice from the city attorney, Stoney said he would remove the statues using the emergency authority he said he possesses.

The mayor's declaration came at a special meeting of the council originally scheduled to set in motion the state-outlined removal process and introduce policing reform. Instead, Stoney asked council members to endorse a resolution he had drawn up for immediate removal.

Interim City Attorney Haskell Brown said he had not reviewed Stoney's resolution.

However, Brown said, any contention that Stoney has the authority to remove the statues outside of the state process would contradict legal advice he has previously given city leaders. He cautioned that it could draw litigation.

The council decided to schedule a special meeting for Thursday at 1 p.m. to vote on the matter, allowing Brown's office time to review the resolution and meet public noticing requirements necessary for a formal vote. The meeting was later canceled.

"I think we need to act today, and we will act immediately," Stoney said shortly before Wednesday's meeting adjourned.

About an hour later, crews arrived at the Jackson statue. A crowd began forming soon after, as word spread that the monument's removal was imminent.

Council member Michael Jones, who represents the 9th District, has publicly pushed to remove the statues since the white supremacist Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville in 2017. With the ongoing unrest, Jones said he feared that a similar event could unfold on Monument Avenue if the city didn't remove the statues.

"[Stoney] did the right thing," Jones said. "It wasn't the popular thing, but it was the right thing."

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Until about 4:40 p.m. Wednesday, the statue of Stonewall Jackson had stood on its granite base since Oct. 11, 1919.

Crews loaded it onto a flatbed truck and took it to storage, where it will stay until the City Council can go through the 60-day administrative process to determine its future, Stoney said.

It's unclear when crews might remove the statues of Confederate Gen. J.E.B. Stuart or Confederate naval commander Matthew Fontaine Maury, or other such iconography around the city.

The state-owned Robert E. Lee monument is the subject of an ongoing legal fight. A Richmond judge recently extended an injunction barring Gov. Ralph Northam from moving it.

Stoney told the council that removing the statues would cost $1.8 million. A private fundraiser was underway to reimburse the sum to the city, he said.

The procedural questions mattered little to those standing in the downpour Wednesday.

Soaked to the bone, they endured to witness a moment many thought may never come.