

# At a time of racial reckoning, the Gray Ghost becomes grayer

By Christopher Connell  
SPECIAL TO THE FAUQUIER TIMES

With no fanfare or firestorm, the board of the Mosby Heritage Area Association in mid-July changed its name to Virginia Piedmont Heritage Area Association. Leaders say it better reflects the group's mission to preserve the history of the region, from the 1600s to the present, looking at all who left their marks on the region, including Native Americans, fighters, farmers and escaped slaves.

Founded in 1995, the Association tells schoolchildren, visitors and residents alike stories from an 1,800-square-mile expanse of the Piedmont that stretches across Fauquier, Loudoun, western Prince William, Warren and Clarke counties. The name change had been under discussion for two years. "This year, our 25th anniversary, seemed like a good time to make a change," said Dulany Morison, chair of the association's board. "The passionate narrative around the country [about racism] was just another reason why we wanted to look at whether this was the time to act."

Virginia once counted more than 200 Confederate statues and memorials, more than any other state, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center. The equestrian statue of Robert E. Lee, bespattered with Black Lives Matter slogans and graffiti, still stands on Monument Avenue in Richmond pending resolution of a lawsuit against Gov. Ralph Northam's removal order, but other Confederate statues have come down in Charlottesville, Leesburg, Alexandria, Norfolk, Virginia Beach and elsewhere.

Ardent defenders decry what they term "cancel culture" as an attempt to erase history. Passionate opponents say these memorials glamorized traitors and racists, ignore the history of enslaved people and perpetuate racism to this day.

The men who answered Col. John Singleton Mosby's call to join his newly formed 43rd Battalion, Virginia Cavalry, or Mosby's Rangers, staged guerilla raids, disrupted Union supplies, and even captured a sleeping General Edwin Stoughton at his Fairfax courthouse headquarters. The Zorro-like Mosby became known as the Gray Ghost. A 38-mile stretch of Route 50 from the Fairfax County line to Opequon Creek in Winchester still bears his name, with five highway signs displaying a silhouette of a jaunty Mosby on horseback.

Mosby alienated many allies after the war by embracing Grant and saying it was wrong for the South to fight a war to defend slavery, but the legend lived on, in Ranger memoirs, biographies and even a syndicated "Gray Ghost" television series that ran in 1957. When the U.S. Army Ranger Association created a Ranger Hall of Fame at Fort Benning, Georgia, in 1992, Mosby was inducted in the first class.

The man and the myths still stir passions. Here are the viewpoints of nearly a dozen citizens of Fauquier and nearby counties about Mosby and the broader debate across America around Confederate monuments and racism.

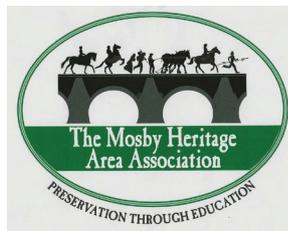
## A change of name, not mission

Dulany Morison became chair of the Mosby Heritage board in 2016 and led the internal de-



TIMES STAFF PHOTO/COY FERRELL

The Mosby statue in Old Town Warrenton near the Old Jail features a informational plaque in addition to the prominent sculpture.



The new logo for the Virginia Piedmont Heritage Area (right) replaces the original one.

*liberations that resulted in changing the name to Virginia Piedmont. Eight generations of his family have lived in Welbourne house, built before the Revolutionary War; the 565-acre estate was once a plantation worked by enslaved Black people. Great-great-grandfather Richard Dulany, a Confederate colonel, founded the Upperville Colt & Horse Show in 1853 and served as a master of the Piedmont Fox Hounds. Morison, who majored in Southern History at the University of Virginia, runs a horse boarding facility for fox hunters at Stoke, another historic family farm.*

Our mission from the outset was broad. We've always been an organization that works to highlight all the history that's taken place in the heritage area. ... In 1995 [the founders] landed on the name Mosby for two reasons: his Civil War gue-



Dulany Morison and VPHA President Jennifer Moore

rilla operations overlapped with the geographic region that the foundation got together to protect, and he was and is an extremely intriguing, historic figure that everybody -- particularly at that time but still today -- found fascinating. You also have John Mosby Highway coming right down through the heart of the heritage area. But right out of the gate, the name gave the impression we were a Civil War-specific organization. We were always qualifying or explaining to people that [was not

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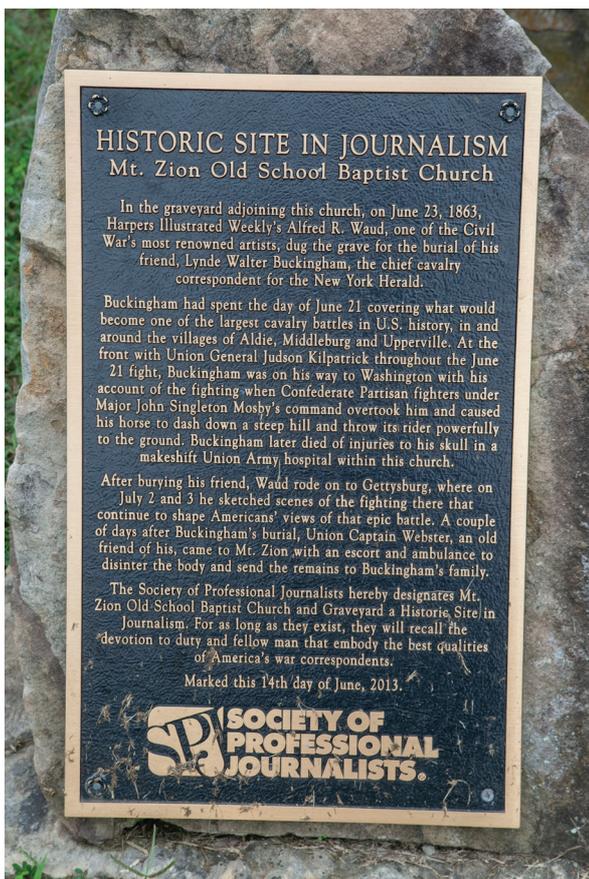
TIMES STAFF PHOTO/ROBIN EARL

An artifact of the Battle of Mount Defiance in April of 1863.

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the case]. It was brought up almost every year at our annual (board) retreats, as early as 2006. ... In 2016 the board [decided] maybe just changing the logo would make it clearer. Now it's Goose Creek Bridge with different figures from every major time period reflected in the logo. But it made the Mosby name make even less sense.

We asked ourselves, "OK, what new name should we have to make sure we're not involved in any political discussion, but also that would be celebrated by all the communities of the Heritage Area?" We landed on Virginia Piedmont. I think the bulk of our followers said, "That makes sense." We haven't heard a lot of feedback, but probably 4-to-1, it's been celebration by long-term members as well as preservation partners and members of the community. We've always had the good fortune to have a good reputation and loyal supporters. At the end of 2019 we had our largest total [raised] to date. Our annual budget is around \$350,000.



TIMES STAFF PHOTO/ROBIN EARL  
Not all monuments about Mosby's Civil War exploits focus on the Gray Ghost.

## Common ancestors, divergent views

*Robert deTreville Lawrence, 75, is a cofounder of the Walker Jones law firm with a passionate interest in Virginia history, including that of ancestors who fought for the Confederacy. He recently wrote a letter to the editor expressing concern that the tall obelisk honoring Mosby might be removed from in front of the Warrenton Courthouse, although the Board of Supervisors has not entertained that idea.*

My mother's family is from The Plains. We just got here in 1813. I enjoy history and I enjoy sharing it. It breaks my heart to see people uninformed about the truth and getting caught up in the pressure of the moment to do things without understanding the consequences or the basis for what they're doing. My wife and I have supported the Mosby Association from the beginning. We're disappointed the name was changed, but I can understand it was done for the right reasons. This name change thing is not fact-driven. It's a political response to the alt-right and ultra-right stuff that's been stirred up by the present administration. All of this [including the Black Lives Matter movement] is politicians taking advantage of Whites and Blacks to achieve political objectives. That's all it is.

[Lawrence welcomed removing Confederate symbols from state flags.] A cab driver in Charleston [South Carolina] once told my wife and I, "If you all understood how much it hurts us to see that flag, you wouldn't fly it." And they are exactly right. It's hurtful and it ought to come down. A [Confederate] soldier standing by the courthouse door with a rifle in his arm, that can easily be seen as inappropriate. It doesn't offend me but if offends somebody, particularly a Black person, then that would be of concern to me, too. But I'm concerned about [other] monuments.

Mosby was a good man. ... He couldn't have survived as he did during the war without the support of not only white people but Black people. After the war he practiced law here. He owned the property that is now Haiti [the neighborhood in downtown Warrenton] and developed it into small lots so former slaves could build homes.

**I just don't want to see the true history, good and bad, warts and all, erased or changed because it makes someone uncomfortable.**

ERIC BUCKLAND

park adjacent to the battlefields.

I grew up like a lot of southern children hearing stories about the Civil War and was never all that interested. The Civil War worked out the way it was supposed to, as far as I'm concerned. I remember the Jim Crow days and the beginnings of the civil rights [era]. I remember the Vietnam War fight, and fights over the war in Iraq. I've lived through enough that I know that in times that feel terrible, the country comes out better each time. ... I've taken part in protests every Saturday since Memorial Day on the plaza in the center of Warrenton, not just for Black Lives Matter but other issues. Somebody makes remarks, usually there's a prayer, and then we stretch ourselves along the main streets going in and out of Warrenton. Eighty people turned out in the rain last weekend. It's heartwarming.

**The only reason John S. Mosby is known today is because of his Civil War exploits. Very few people know any of his post-Civil War activities, but they know the Gray Ghost. I'm very glad they changed the name.**

GEORGIA HERBERT

paigned with Grant and became a consul [to Hong Kong].

I have been a card-carrying member of the Heritage organization since it was founded. I See MOSBY, page 17



Eric Buckland, president of the Stuart-Mosby Historical Society, is holding photographs of Mosby (left) and Capt. Henry C. Flint of the 1st Vermont Cavalry (right). Flint was KIA in the fight at Miskel's farm that occurred on April 1, 1863, when the men he was leading attacked Mosby and his men at the farm. The Miskel farmhouse (background) is where Mosby spent the night prior to the fight.

[He also won a case on behalf of 163 former enslaved people whose owner had instructed in his will they receive the proceeds from sale of his plantation.] Mosby had the trust and confidence of those former slaves, and he did right by them. If you assume the defeated South was still racist and antagonist to freed slaves, Mosby went out on a limb to do the right thing.

*Georgia Herbert, 70, who calls Lawrence cousin since they share 19th century ancestors, is a former county supervisor, attorney and environmentalist who lives in The Plains in a farmhouse, Avenel, where Gen. Robert E. Lee stayed the night before the Second Battle of Manassas. Her great-grandfather was a Ranger. Herbert, who served from 1988 to 1995, was a leader in the successful fight to block Disney America from opening a theme*

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was in one of the very early conversations with [co-founder] Janet Grayson Whitehouse and her husband Charlie and I said to them at the time, “Don’t name it Mosby. That’s a mistake. Please name it anything but that.” Obviously, there were other people who thought it was a good idea. The only reason John S. Mosby is known today is because of his Civil War exploits. Very few people know any of his post-Civil War activities, but they know the Gray Ghost. I’m very glad they changed the name.

### A Keeper of the Flame

*Eric Buckland, 66, is a retired Army lieutenant colonel, author and president of the Stuart-Mosby Historical Society. The 150-member society operates a small Stuart-Mosby Cavalry Museum in Centreville, and some proceeds from books it sells have gone to refurbish the now-removed statue of J.E.B. Stuart on Monument Avenue in Richmond. Buckland, born in Kansas and raised in Connecticut, says the society’s twice-a-year bus tours of Mosby’s Confederacy draw Civil War buffs from across the country. The Virginia Piedmont Facebook page recently featured short videos of Buckland’s talks at the gravesites of two Rangers in Sharon Cemetery in Middleburg.*

I become very focused, maybe almost obsessive when I get interested in something, and I became really focused on Mosby and his men. ... To me the [Heritage Association’s] name is not critical as long as they continue to tell history in an unfettered way, both sides. If the name change will allow them to continue that, and people will continue to come, I think that’s a good thing.

While I still think Mosby’s Rangers are a hook for a lot of people, there are a lot of other things of interest. In the [part of the Piedmont] known as Mosby’s Confederacy, you had Quakers, Unionists, free Black men, secessionists, any number of things. You have the Revolutionary War history and all the things that happened after the (Civil) War. But I don’t think you can ignore or do away with what was going on with Mosby’s Rangers.

I have no doubt that a move will be made on his obelisk in Warrenton and, frankly, I’m surprised they haven’t torn down all the John Mosby Highway signs already. ... I’m sure a lot of my southern friends will be disappointed in my response, but as long as the history, the stories, are not smothered, I think there will have to be some changes [to Confederate memorials]. It seems like it’s going that way.

I just don’t want to see the true history, good and bad, warts and all, erased or changed because it makes someone uncomfortable. ... The easy story for everyone to tell [about the war] is the Union was for freeing the slaves and the Confederacy was for keeping the slaves. That’s just not the case. If you’d asked nine of 10 soldiers on either side, “Why are you fighting?”, northerners would have said, “To preserve the Union” and southerners would have said, “Because we’ve



Karen White is the co-founder and director of the Afro-American Historical Association in The Plains.

been invaded.”

Was slavery involved? Absolutely. Was it a war started by the wealthy and the people seeking power more than anything else, like every war anybody ever gets into? Yes.

### Descended from slaves and slave owners

*Fauquier native Karen Hughes White, 67, is executive director of the Afro-American Historical Association of Fauquier County which she co-founded nearly three decades ago. When she began researching her family history, she discovered they were in Fauquier when the county was founded in 1759 and other kin in Virginia before that. She received a “Heritage Hero” award from the Mosby preservation group in 2007.*

My first introduction to Mosby was seeing the highway markers of “the Gray Ghost” and my mouth opening wide. Seeing the name, my gut feeling was, “That’s an area I am not included in.” For me as an African American with some knowledge of the Civil War and local history, when I hear of Mosby, I think of people that were on the forefront to sustain the institution of slavery. My ancestors were involved with that history, both African Americans who were enslaved, and white ancestors that enslaved them.

Dulany Morison asked me straight up if having that [Mosby] name hurt me, or if it caused me any pain or suffering. I told him yes. I felt really good when I learned they changed it. But I warned Dulany that this would not be an easy walk because I was sure he would hit a bit of resistance. What I have found in this county is that the only time they’ll throw that part in [Mosby’s postwar support for Grant and criticism of slavery] is if they are trying to justify keeping a Mosby marker or statue up, but it’s really for what he did in the war.

You went quite a few years without any [Confederate] statues at all being erected. If you want to be truthful, they were erected to send a message to people of color. They may have lost the war, but they never gave up on the cause. That’s what’s going on right now.

I can’t remember being taught about slavery in school. I remember being taught how kind and considerate General Lee was, and the servants – not the word slave but servants -- were happy. My parents were working as domestic help, and I misunderstood what they were even talking about. I had to go back years later and find a fourth-grade history book and realized that was what was written and what the teacher taught from.

### ‘Leave everything alone’

*Harold Meadows, a 65-year-old Fauquier machinist with Confederate ancestors, is a Mosby admirer who is troubled by efforts to remove any statues commemorating those who fought on the side of the South.*

Both my great-grandfathers fought with the 29th Virginia Regiment. They were from Tazewell, back in the mountains of southwest Virginia, where I was born. I’m against moving any

statues for any reason, no matter what they’re for. There’s so much history around Warrenton about Mosby. He was against secession, then he showed up in uniform. A friend said, “I thought you were against secession?” and Mosby told him, “I am, but Virginia is my mother, and I can’t fight against my mother.” [After the war] he practiced law in Warrenton but closed his office and moved his family to Charlottesville. ... They were being ridiculed because he was a Republican and good friends with Grant.

He only went to one reunion with the Rangers. They viewed him as a turncoat.

The war was fought here in Northern Virginia. All of Virginia was a battleground. ... They weren’t traitors. No one after the war was even arrested or tried for treason, no one. That’s just something repeated over and over again that people take as facts, but it ain’t history. ... The Confederates and the Union had a big reunion together in Gettysburg in 1913. A lot of them were friends. There was no animosity, anything, because the war was over.

They say Black lives matter. I don’t recall anybody that says they didn’t. Are they saying the work of Martin Luther King didn’t matter, that King didn’t do anything? That LBJ signing the civil rights law didn’t matter? They’re going back to like 1619 [when the first slaves were brought to America]. You had a Black president, Obama, for eight years, there’s Blacks on the Supreme Court, all the Black governors and mayors. I don’t agree with [the protesters]. If they want to put up their monuments, fine, but leave everything else alone.

### Mosby connections in classrooms

*When Richard T. Gillespie started teaching history in Purcellville High School 47 years ago, he soon discovered that some of his students were direct descendants of Mosby or Mosby Men, as the Rangers were called. After he became the Mosby Heritage Area Association’s historian, he often made the same discovery in classrooms where he gave presentations. Gillespie, who was the executive director when he retired in 2017, is steeped in both the region’s history and that of the organization.*

They worked to secure support from municipalities that represent the landscape between the Bull Run and Blue Ridge Mountains, and the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers. They looked for something those five counties shared in common and realized the most famous person from the



TIMES STAFF PHOTO/ROBIN EARL

Built in 1801 to 1802, Goose Creek Bridge was a feature in the Battle of Upperville during the Civil War.

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area was Mosby. They were looking for a way to get people's interest. It was not seen as particularly controversial. We found opening the door to Mosby allowed us to talk about slavery, about the fact there were Unionists in the Heritage Area, Quakers who didn't believe in war, and how things changed in the post-war years. It seemed like a good vehicle at the time. At that point the Civil War was taught as it probably had been for a long, long time. Certainly, it was about slavery, but it didn't mean you couldn't tell stories about both sides, particularly if they were local.

If you talked about Mosby, everybody had an opinion. They either loved him or hated him or they had an ancestor that rode with him. In 2015 after the slaughter in Charleston [the killing of nine African Americans by a white supremacist at a Bible study in a South Carolina church] we considered whether we were appropriately doing our mission for the changing times. We ended up changing our logo to the Goose Creek Bridge. Times change, sensibilities change.

This year with the Black Lives Matter protests and long, aching discussions about what was going on, the board decided that if you were going to continue to have access to work with the counties, to work with parks and recreation, with public libraries and school systems, and even [securing] corporate grants, that having that name could be a problem. The mission [of preservation] doesn't change, whether your name is Mosby or Virginia Piedmont. People can say it's cancel culture, but the care with which they did it — Virginians handling an awkward and difficult situation in a very above board, intelligent manner — made me extremely proud.

#### Guiding tours of Mosby's exploits

Donald Hakenson leads bus tours to visit places where the Gray Ghost legend was born, including the Hathaway House near The Plains, where Mosby climbed out a window and clung to a walnut tree while a Union squad searched the premises for him in vain. Hakenson, a veteran and retired Army civil servant, has written several books about Mosby and is a past president of the Stuart-Mosby Historical Society. His great-great-grandfathers served under Gen. J.E.B. Stuart.

It's a sad thing to see the Mosby Heritage Area Association changed their name because it was Mosby who operated in that area and made it famous. History is to be studied and learned from. If your family had been in Virginia for 100 years and you were a farmer who did not own slaves and somebody came to you and said, "There's an invading army on your soil," do you say, "I want to keep slavery," and run to fight the enemy? I think not. They grabbed their weapon to defend their soil, their family and their heritage.

Here's what I believe: I believe there is racism in our country. I do not believe it is systemic. I believe George Floyd might have been murdered and I think that is a terrible thing. But for us to go around saying, "All right, now everything dealing with the Confederacy ... needs to be taken down and erased," I don't believe in that. It's a witch hunt.

I think all lives matter. I think Black lives matter. I think it's terrible here we are in the year 2020 and we're still dealing with the issues of racism. But some of the narrative going on is true and some is not. If we're going to start hiding stuff and eliminating stuff (from history), that just leaves a bad taste in my mouth. We're not a perfect nation, but I think we've done a lot of really



Donald Hakenson with a picture of Col. John Singleton Mosby.

good things and everybody deserves a voice.

#### Seeking 'full and balanced' narrative

For years, Eirik Harteis would needle his Taylorstown neighbor Richard Gillespie about the Mosby Heritage Area Association name. Harteis, 51, teaches world history at South Lakes High School in Reston. He met Gillespie, whom he calls a role model, at a class the Mosby Heritage historian was teaching for NOVA Parks.

Through the course of that class, as I came to learn more about Mosby, I said to him, "I'm just not right with Mosby yet." On some levels, it felt neo-Confederate, like the symbol that you see on the roadside signs of the victorious Mosby waving his plumed hat. With my students, appealing to ... a heroic figure associated with the Confederacy was a message that was going to fall flat in terms of making a compelling case for why the historic landscapes and places where we live and work need to be preserved.

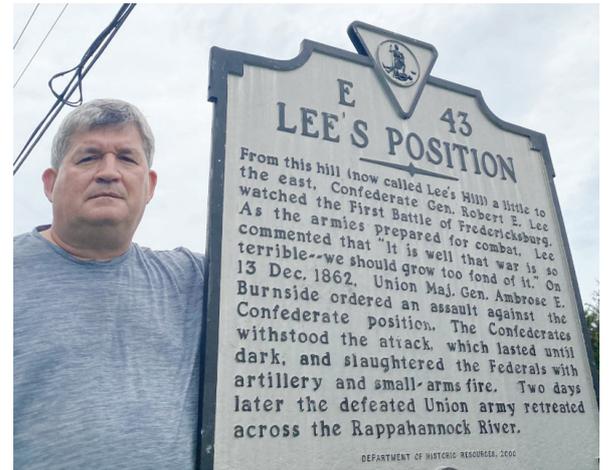
This part of Virginia is very connected to its Civil War experience, but we have not done a very good job telling a full and balanced narrative about the past. The burden of that falls heavily upon our African American students. We need to rectify that as quickly as possible and move to redress the problems we have created in the past.

Having said that, it's not just about African Americans. It's about doing more to get our girls and women into the story. It's about Latinos and people from Asia. We have many, many threads that we can focus on. For too long we've focused just on one at the exclusion of others. It's time to pull back and see the whole tapestry. In doing so I think we're going to find connections and energy and interest from corners we haven't seen in the past.

#### Photographing memorials for posterity

Dwayne Moyers is a Stafford real estate agent and avid photographer who posts photos on Flickr, many showing homes for sale but a great number showing road markers of Virginia history, especially the Civil War. He's been doing this for more than a decade.

I've been interested in the Civil War for quite some time, ever since I could remember, back in elementary school days. My family is from Rockingham County, I have family members who served in the Brocks Gap Rifles, a [Confederate] volunteer infantry regiment. The pictures started with my concern about Confederate history disappearing not only from textbooks but the actual tributes to the dead. I've always had a fear the day would come when a lot of these Confederate



Dwayne Moyers likes to document road markers that reveal Virginia's history.

memorials and statues would be taken down and, here we are, it's happening.

Mosby was a daredevil of his time. His raid at the Fairfax Courthouse is one for the books. He was a genius. Confederate soldiers were heroes of their time. It didn't have anything to do with slaves or racism. None of those common soldiers ever had the acquired wealth to purchase slaves.

Those common soldiers are only known to history because they have their name etched on a memorial. I could just see this coming. I thought before all of this is gone, before highway markers are ripped out of the ground, somebody needs to document it, record it. Leave it to future historians to judge.

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EIRIK HARTEIS

#### Optimism about social justice in the future

Donna Bohanon of Ashburn chairs the Black History Committee of the Friends of the Thomas Balch Library in the Town of Leesburg, which specializes in helping Loudoun County residents trace their family history. Bohannon, a retired State Department employee and cross-cultural awareness trainer, has helped local Black and white congregations form "Race Supper Clubs" to hold frank conversations. A native of the District of Columbia, her interest in social justice came early; when Donna was three, her mother attended the March on Washington.

I love history and I am aware there are nuances in everybody's story, but when it comes to Confederates, I have a very hard time to make the effort to learn about them. I found it hard to go to the Mosby Heritage website, even though I knew they were involved in very positive things. They worked very hard on getting the Willisville community [a historically Black village] on the National Historic Register. It was just very difficult to get past the name. Once they changed it, a lot of angst on my part was lifted.

A lot of (the Confederacy) had to do with maintaining a system held by people with power and money I would characterize as one-percenters in today's terms. Maintaining a system where people were subjugated was so important to them. The whites who were not one-percenters -- they may have been farmers and poor people -- were being fed stories about the worth of enslaved people versus their worth. But it's also important to understand that African Americans were being used as a commodity during the enslavement period and used to fear monger after the war, up unto this day.

Six years ago, after Eric Garner's killing (by police), I was really upset. This time around, I'm optimistic because I know we are being heard as African Americans. The outpouring of other races, other faiths, people around the world, that recognition and their denouncing the treatment of African Americans and violence by cops, that is encouraging to me.

**Editor's Note:** The interviews were taped and condensed and edited for reasons of space.

