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GEORGE FLOYD'S MURDER: ONE YEAR LATER



JAMES H. WALLACE/TIMES-DISPATCH

A demonstration at the Robert E. Lee statue on Richmond's Monument Avenue on June 1 against police brutality dissolved into chaos after police fired tear gas. The demonstrators had gathered in response to the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police on May 25, 2020.

AFTER UNREST IN RICHMOND, WHAT HAS CHANGED?

BY JOHN RAMSEY AND K. BURNELL EVANS • Richmond Times-Dispatch

While people across the country were grappling with a new threat to their lives last year, an old one was captured on video.

The footage of George Floyd, a Black man murdered by police, traveled swiftly around the country. The reaction — pain, rage, disgust — spilled into the streets.

In Richmond, thousands marched or gathered by the Robert E. Lee monument for 90 straight days to protest police vio-

lence and racism, undeterred by the growing threat of the coronavirus.

They came out of fear, out of anger, out of love; they toppled Confederate monuments and pressed officials to topple other monuments to racism. In the past 12 months, streets have been renamed; criminal justice reforms passed; and promises made by elected officials that the work toward a more just society is just beginning.

Yet police responded to the protests

with tear gas for those who confronted them — some protesters set fires and broke windows — and for those who were peacefully gathered with their hands up.

“Man Dies After Medical Incident During Police Interaction,” read the headline on the initial Minneapolis police release about Floyd’s death on May 25, 2020. Those words weren’t false, but they hid the truth. Details matter.

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ON MONUMENT AVENUE, ‘WHAT IS COMMUNITY? ... IS IT THE PEOPLE THAT JUST SHOW UP?’

The statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee still casts a long shadow on Monument Avenue.

As protests erupted across the nation one year ago, the circle around the statue became a flashpoint between police and protesters calling for racial and social justice. Riot gear was worn. Tear gas burned. Protesters were arrested.

By summer, it became a safe space for a community that had never felt welcome in the Lee statue’s shadow.

As graffiti covered the pedestal where Lee sits on his horse nearly 75 feet overhead, community gathered.

In July, the city began removing the Confederate iconography along Monument Avenue. An injunction filed by a handful of residents halted the de-throning of Lee.

In anticipation of his removal, the state fenced off the area so none could gather.

A year later, Lee remains. So does the community.

Lawrence West is founder of BLM RVA, a community of activists who have occupied the grounds around the Lee statue daily since last summer.

As told to Times-Dispatch staff writer Ali Rockett:

You can’t mention Robert E. Lee without mentioning the occupiers.

We get less fuss about our presence. They’ve gotten used to our culture. They might still complain about the volume of the music, but not about the music itself.

One neighbor — a woman — told me, you live right over there. I don’t live on the median, but yeah, we’re part of the community now.

Even police have gained respect for us. They thought we were going away, but we haven’t. They’re still enforcing stupid laws. But we’re still here.

We’ve — no, Richmond is redefining what community

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SHABAN ATHUMAN/TIMES-DISPATCH

Kalia Harris says she’s glad to be a bridge between generations.

HOLDING POWERFUL PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE AND KEEPING EACH OTHER SAFE

Kalia Harris’ car, filled with cases of water, medical kits and art supplies for political education teach-ins, was known as the moving Freedom School among organizers during protests.

Her bullhorn was in the passenger seat next to the “Freedom tambourine” she would shake outside of Richmond City Jail when people arrested the night before were released. Many were youths she mentored.

She helped organize mutual aid efforts that would redis-

tribute almost \$200,000 into communities and is now the co-executive director of Virginia Student Power Network.

As told to Times-Dispatch staff writer Sabrina Moreno:

My family has been in the city for generations at this point, and the same things that my grandparents were demanding in their time, we are still demanding: an end to police violence. An investment into our communities.

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Police accountability

Life experience informed mission of Henrico’s Nelson. **Page A3**

Toll on mental health

Richmond muralist says art provided her an outlet. **Page A4**

Reflections in Minneapolis

Floyd’s death laid bare racial disparities in Minnesota. **Page A14**

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Richmond remains in need of closure and change. **Page A18**

GEORGE FLOYD'S MURDER: ONE YEAR LATER

HENRICO'S TYRONE NELSON ON HIS LIFE'S INSPIRATION TO PUSH FOR POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY

Henrico County Supervisor Tyrone Nelson, on his push for a civilian-involved oversight panel for the county police department after seeing the video of George Floyd's murder and subsequent protests in downtown Richmond.

As told to Times-Dispatch staff writer C. Suarez Rojas and staff photographer Shaban Athuman:

There's so many [police] shootings that happened over the last couple of years. I think the tension just kind of built up and people went to the streets. I know the marches were centered in downtown Richmond, but my response was to ask for a couple of things of my colleagues on the Board of Supervisors a week later.

I asked to rename a building [Confederate Hills Recreation Center] and for us to stop sending our police officers to support Richmond and state police because they were tear gassing citizens. I also asked for a review of potential policy changes in our police department regarding use of force, like chokeholds and things like that.

The fourth thing was a civilian review board. That pretty much just died last week with no action on it.

Our board had a lot of conversations around its creation. For the first time during my term on the board — I'm in my 10th year — we really looked at how police interact with citizens. Since then we've hired our first Black police chief and we're looking at a few other things.

I don't really know why I asked, I just felt like I had to do it. I was 18 years old when the Rodney King video came out. I remember watching that when I was basically a kid. I felt like I wasn't in a position to do anything then, but now I am, and I need to make my voice heard.

Last year I listened to the story of a young woman here who had a negative experience with a Henrico County police officer after she was pulled over. That kind of motivated me.

I had an experience like it when I was 18 and going to Old Dominion University. I was driving my cousin's car and the speedometer was broken. So I'm speeding and the police lights come on behind



SHABAN ATHUMAN/TIMES-DISPATCH

Tyrone Nelson, a member of the Henrico Board of Supervisors, reflected on the killing of George Floyd on May 19, at Henrico County Government Complex. He recalled the impact of the Rodney King video in the 1990s.

me. I slow down, but I don't stop. I just freaked out. My roommate was in the passenger seat, spazzing out. We were about half a mile from my cousin's house so I decide we'll stop there.

This was during my first semester. I was a good kid. No drinking, no drugs, nothing like that. I haven't done anything other than speeding, but I didn't stop. There were 5 or 6 police cars following when we finally stop. They open the car door, I'm trying to get out, they yank me out, slammed me on the front of the car, put me in handcuffs.

I was scared. ... I was embarrassed. They made me feel like I had done something wrong.

Something similar happened to that lady. She crossed two lanes without using her turn signal. She didn't stop but was only .33 miles away from her mom's house — based upon what the [police] report said — so she pulled up there. By the time she got there, our people were pissed. The officer that pulled her out of the car was angry because she wasn't following directions. That's wrong.

We need to talk about how we deal with people, how police talk to people. They need to treat them with respect, like human beings.

As a Black man who is almost 48, I still get nervous if I'm being pulled over. My 18-year-old son is a huge dude. He's larger than me. He's a

nice guy, but if you just walk up on him in a car, if you're going off how he looks, you might be intimidated if you're a smaller person.

So he and my teenage daughter are driving now. ... I worry about them. I've been giving them the talk their whole lives about being Black and driving, or just being in the store, or whatever might be the case. So I basically have to tell them how to navigate through a world that views you below your humanity sometimes. It sucks.

Some of it is frustrating. Changing the name of a building is kind of easy, and it's symbolic, but it's hard when you get into real conversations about holding police accountable and the different mechanisms that come with it.

We could have just settled for a review board with no real investigative power, but I'm just not there anymore. That's why I pulled the proposal. There's no need to just keep on doing something when it's not going to change anything.

We talked about it for a year; citizens got involved, people seemed to support it, but we've got five board members. We couldn't get three of them to support it.

We've got two Black men on this board. If neither of us say something, it probably wouldn't be discussed.

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RICHMONDER AARON BROWN HAD 'NEVER REALLY BEEN ONE TO PROTEST. ... BUT IT JUST STRUCK A CHORD IN ME.'

Aaron Brown, a 28-year-old musical artist who grew up in Richmond and Petersburg and performs under the name AARNXBRWN, was involved in local protests last summer.

The protests, he said, channeled feelings of unity and joy, but also fear and anger.

On June 1, Brown was in a large crowd at the Robert E. Lee statue on Monument Avenue when authorities, without warning, fired tear gas at them about 30 minutes before an 8 p.m. curfew.

"There was all these people there talking, the energy and love was super amazing ... and then I blinked. I heard someone scream. The speed in which it cleared was amazing," he said. "It was unreal. I kind of just walked through [the tear gas] because it hadn't clicked in my mind what was happening."

"By the time I got out of the circle, I was ready to fight and yell at the cops. It was a crazy experience just seeing the energy switch like that."

Brown recently moved to New York City but his participation in Richmond's protests last year inspired him to see how he could have a more direct impact on the community.

As told to Times-Dispatch staff writer C. Suarez Rojas:



COURTESY OF AARON BROWN

Aaron Brown was at the Lee statue when tear gas was fired.

I was working on a beat one night when my homie pulled up the video on Instagram. She was like, "Have you seen this George Floyd video?" I had seen a few things in people's Instagram stories about it, but I hadn't actually watched it, so she showed it to me.

These things happen often, but this was different. It was just so blatant. And everything was aligned in such a way that there was no way you could see it and be OK. It couldn't be swept under the rug. It was a crazy feeling, and it was hurtful. It was a lot.

We weren't in town that Friday night when the protests [in Richmond] started. I was at the beach. We heard Richmond was going crazy. It just didn't seem real.

We got back the next day and we're just chilling at home on Clay Street. We started to hear a crowd, so we decided to see what it was all about. We ended up at Marcus-David Peters Circle. People were speaking, and I just thought it was super cool.

I didn't think I was

going to be down with it. I've never really been one to protest. I'm not like a revolutionary freedom fighter. I don't think of myself like that, but it just struck a chord in me.

We had the L.A. riots and so many different situations where there have been outbursts. Sometimes it seems to become normalized and, even as a Black person, I wonder, "What's the point?"

But this time just felt different. I guess everyone has their session in the fight. I felt passionate, it was like, "I have to do this."

My fight wasn't really toward only police brutality. I know a lot of people spoke about that, but this is about racism. That's what I was there for.

I was emotionally charged through it all because of situations I've had, and my own personal traumas. I think a lot of people's traumas got wrapped up into it. It was just a shock ... like we finally had a chance to participate in something that's never physically manifested this way for many of us.

I kind of had a weird

life. My mom was a teacher. She drilled education into me. My father, I never met him until I was 21. We lived in Richmond and Petersburg, but my mom taught in Chesterfield, so I went to school there.

I got to see how people live in Chesterfield, but when I go home, I would hear gunshots and all that kind of stuff, so it was a weird parallel. Ultimately we all face the same obstacles.

At the end of the day, this is about one group of humans dehumanizing another group of humans. My people are no different than any other.

So after all that, I went to work for the Richmond ambassador program in the Office of Community Wealth Building. We worked in a couple of different RRHA communities.

As a protest organizer, after a while it felt like the best thing to do was go work in those communities.

I'm proud of what we did in the protests, because it poured into the national movement and allowed for these new laws and agendas to pass. That's cool and I appreciate all of that, but when I think of Richmond, I know these communities are still hurting.

They're tearing down Creighton Court right now and a lot of people are getting displaced. And we just glaze over that.

I don't know, man. I feel like we roared and made some noise. We turned some heads in a good way, but I feel like a lot of this stuff is deeply ingrained in Richmond.

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Harris

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The police are still violent. They're still killing people, and they're still being funded by our city and state. They actually got more money. After this whole year of trauma, violence, resistance, they got money out of that. They're getting new cars.

But aside from that, there has been a lot of growth and healing among the people who were out for over 100 days last year. We've seen the Richmond mutual aid and disaster relief group be able to help so many folks through what they've created, which is basically packing groceries and sending them out.

All of that was able to be done through the power of community, of people giving us a little bit of their stimulus check or their paychecks or buying extra groceries at the store to drop off at the warehouse.

There's three Black women running for governor. There's the young activists and protesters. Some of them graduated this last month. Many of them are still taking to the streets or organizing their friends into book clubs.

So many things have come out of the protests.

The community fridges that have popped up all over the city. The Civilian Review Board Task Force trying to look at civilian oversight of the police. Legislation over the General Assembly session, the legalization of marijuana. Just wins on wins.

Sometimes it's hard. Because when you look at the battle of stopping police violence, we haven't really gotten to the point where that has stopped.

But what we have done is build our community to the point where we are actually providing care for ourselves outside of the state. We have folks that feel empowered to speak out, whether it's to their city council rep, to their school board — folks aren't just letting stuff fly under the rug anymore.

It's been really an honor to be a bridge sometimes between the younger generation and older generations. It's feeling like the future is in the best hands, but it's also worrying. It's staying outside of the jail all night until students are released. It's being the emergency contact to talk to someone's parents if they were to get arrested.

I think a lot of us are still really processing what it was like a year ago. The surveillance that came from that. There are still folks that have open court cases because Colette [McEachin, Richmond's commonwealth's attorney] didn't drop all the charges.

The holding each other that we were physically doing in the streets is still happening now, because people are still dealing with the effects.



I truly hope people have learned that elections and voting are not going to be the saviors. It will take a diversity of tactics, a mix of taking to the streets and pressuring people in power ... that don't require us to wait for our city council or mayor to take action because if that's the case, we'll be waiting for another generation.

People truly see right through Levar [Stoney]. He takes credit for the Confederate monuments, but we know that it was the people ... before they even lifted a finger to begin to take them down in their shady way.

It was an effort on behalf of Levar's administration to co-op that work and take credit for it, then go all over national media and say, "Oh, we did this." But any good leader would give the credit to who it's deserved, which is the people that they tried so hard to arrest and give charges to.

They're going through court cases, and he's writing op-eds. His time could be so much better used actually solving the problem. People's lives are still at risk.

So to say that there was a moment of reckoning? We've seen with Orlando Carter Jr. that RPD is still shooting people. Marcus-David Peters and Xavier Hill were murdered. We don't want to be mourning the loss of another Black life at the hands of police. We've lost enough people.

Even with his budget, Mayor Stoney has shown where his priorities are. It's not surprising, but it is more of the same. I just hope folks understand that him marching in the streets was way more for his benefit than it ever was for us.

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SHABAN ATHUMAN/TIMES-DISPATCH

Kalia Harris says she has seen some positives as a result of the protests.

GEORGE FLOYD'S MURDER: ONE YEAR LATER



SHABAN ATHUMAN/TIMES-DISPATCH

Jowarnise Caston says her artwork provided an outlet to give voice to her thoughts during Richmond's protests, while also empowering her to confront depression.

POLICE, THE FOCUS OF PROTESTS, SAY NO TO DISCUSSING PAST YEAR.

The Richmond Times-Dispatch asked for an interview with Richmond Police Chief Gerald M. Smith and police who worked during the protests to reflect on the past year. A police spokesman replied with two sentences:

.....
 "Thank you for reaching out about this opportunity. RPD courteously declines to participate in this story at this time."

A follow-up request for an interview was also unsuccessful.

JOWARNISE PAINTED RICHMOND'S WALLS DURING PROTESTS. NOW SHE LOOKS BACK AT THE MENTAL HEALTH TOLL

The first of dozens of murals taking over Richmond's walls this past summer as part of an artist-led project to let silenced voices be heard was Jowarnise Caston's.

The 30-foot-wall at the Virginia Museum of History and Culture showcased a Black woman's hair adorned with jewelry in the shape of the Black power fist — an ode to the C.R.O.W.N. Act banning hair discrimination in Virginia. Beside her was Marcus-David Peters, drawn by fellow muralist Ian Hess.

Meanwhile, the circle informally renamed after Peters and the Confederate monument inside of it was becoming a lasting visual marker filled with paint and condemnations against police violence.

For Jowarnise, who became a full-time artist in 2018, the goal of Mending Walls was to heal. To connect at a time of separation and loss.

Read the full Floyd one year later series here.

As told to Times-Dispatch staff writer Sabrina Moreno:

George Floyd, to me, was not a turning point. It was history being repeated.

But the fear about that? His killing was not the first. My fear back then was that it won't be the last and it has not been the last. It's cyclical.

It gave me hope that moving forward, moving in the right direction, [we won't] be seen as dangerous. As criminal. As being deemed guilty in the eyes of the public court.

I try being able to just be treated justly. Not to be executed. I try.

It being eye opening for so many, that was both relieving and also frustrating. People have been pointing out the issue of unjust treatment and people who are losing their lives on a regular basis.

So what have you all been doing all this time? How did you not see this before now?

There is the fear that it was convenient to be actionable because of the pandemic. There was almost nothing else to do but to pay attention. As we return more and more to normal life, it is the fear of failure.

Even that word. *Normal*. Normal in America has always been that people of color are not treated the same. History has shown that has been acceptable.

Oftentimes, we think of civil rights as something in the past. We learned about it as if all of the issues were overcome. As if racism was a thing of the past. Even sexism and misogyny. We've learned about things as if issues like that don't still exist and they do.

This is an ongoing situation. The fight is ongoing. It doesn't change overnight. People didn't stop being mistreated. Laws still don't protect everyone equally.

I wish I could say it was a turning point. I just can't.



Even before 2020, depression was something that I struggled with.

[The mural featuring Marcus-David Peters] instantly brought me back to my own personal experiences with mental health. My heart just went out to those who instead of receiving the help they need ... you're facing someone who's not even trained to help you. And for that to end in this man losing his life. I can only imagine if that was a family member. If that was a friend. If that was me.

My hope was to open up conversations. The need to talk about the stigma. I also wanted to point out the history. The weight of the history that Black people

carry. We are still picking up the pieces, from families not being able to build the wealth to pass on to the next generation. Because your race literally helps with that.

How something as simple as the hair that grows out of your scalp can prevent you from advancing in a career. It has prevented children from attending school. From being able to graduate. Being promoted on a job they might already have or even being able to attain a job.

If something as simple as the hair that grows out of your head can do that, you also have to think about the history of other things rooted in racism that prevents people from moving forward.



Generally, art is one of the areas that people don't deem as important. I wasn't expecting to be able to redeem myself or come back from "All of my jobs are canceled. I doubt I'll be able to book another job any time soon." And of course, the stress of that with what was happening with racial justice — the intent and the sudden attention to it — left me in a whirlwind of emotions.

Because on the one hand, finally these people are listening as far as what Black people mean or anyone who's saying "Black lives matter." We're not saying *only* Black lives matter but "Black lives matter, as well."

In a weird way, it sort of catapulted my work suddenly. I had an opportunity to use my voice in a way that I'm most comfortable with because I'm not the best talker.

The other flip side is I am also in mourning and I am scared. And I'm highly introverted and a lot of people are reaching out from literally all over the world.

Art sort of sparks the conversation for you without me having to walk up to someone I've never met before.

It's challenged me in a way where it was like either you can stop everything you're doing and just feel hopeless, sit in that depression, or you can step up. Accept the challenge and just say, what can you do? How can you move forward? How can you help others?

You have the internal battle of "I'm just me. I'm just Jowarnise. Does anyone even care what I have to say?" And then finally deciding, "Yes. My voice matters."

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Monument

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looks like. It doesn't look like what they thought. What is community? Is it people who pay to be a part of it? The police? The businesses? Or is it the people that just show up? This is community, too.

Last year, allies or comrades or whatever you call them, they came out in droves. Not everyone here now marched. Some people were there only for the protests. Nothing wrong with that. Everyone has their role.

We've moved beyond the protests. We started programs out of the church.

In the book I'm going to write later, there will be a chapter called fences. That is a fence to keep out community. The fence, the grass. We took

such good care of the area. It's like they let [the grass] grow to cover up what we've lost.

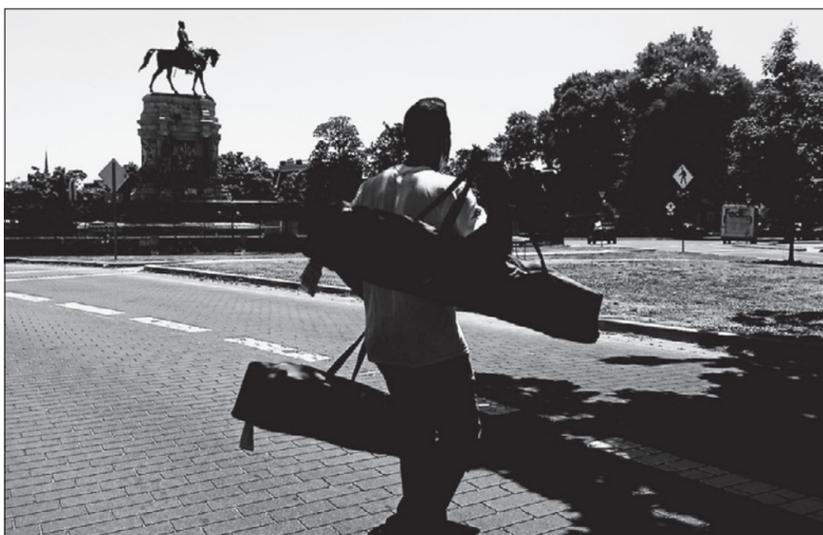
It's been a fight — a long, 12-round fight. I can't wait to see a scorecard. I don't feel like I've been knocked out yet. I haven't been. I'm still standing. We're still standing.

There were distractions along the way. Black folks have been dying for a long time. I'm not saying the only thing that matters is Black lives. But if I'm focused on this one thing, I can't get distracted every other minute.

We got a permit for June 19th. That's huge. The city has some requirements, though.

It's like a part of Richmond solidified.

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SHABAN ATHUMAN/TIMES-DISPATCH

Lawrence West prepares to pitch a tent near the circle around the Robert E. Lee statue. The circle has been renamed informally to honor Marcus-David Peters, who was killed by police in 2018.

GEORGE FLOYD'S MURDER: ONE YEAR LATER



SHABAN ATHUMAN/TIMES-DISPATCH

Atticus Johnson says he felt his life "was in ruins" after his arrest on a felony charge last August outside GVARbar.

ATTICUS JOHNSON WAS AN ORGANIZER AND A STREET MEDIC IN RICHMOND. HE WAS AMONG THE MORE THAN 300 WHO WERE ARRESTED LAST SUMMER.

Atticus Johnson, 19, is an organizer, activist and street medic who participated in the uprisings following George Floyd's murder. On Aug. 20, Johnson was arrested outside GVARbar in what witnesses described as an unprovoked action by police. During the arrest, Johnson, who is transgender and non-binary, was misgendered, he said. The charges — obstruction of justice, a misdemeanor, and assault on a law enforcement officer, a felony — are still pending.

As told to Times-Dispatch staff writer Ali Rockett:

I grew up in Richmond. I'm very normalized to police stopping you just because you live in the hood. I consistently felt like I lived in a police state before I even had the vocabulary to describe it. Studying political science and now having the vocabulary, I try to radicalize as many people as I can toward the abolition of police. That summer really did it for a lot of people. It was an empowering moment for the city.

I function mostly as a street medic, outside of my organizing. The first night, I got there late. The march had already started. I finally caught up and the march was at a standstill in front of this line of police. I'm like, it's about to get started, Richmond's about to start having the same situation all these other cities have been having.

The whole night is a blur, really. I remember watching the bus go up in flames. I remember watching people

get shot at. I got body slammed while administering aid to someone who had been hit in the head and rendered unconscious. I was tear gassed and pepper sprayed and Mace and it was a very long and very tiresome night.

But for a lot of people, that was the first time in which they ever felt a sense of community within the city. Honestly, that was one of the biggest crowds I have ever seen at once in the city.

The night I got arrested, GVAR was surrounded by cops. We'd been told we were allowed to be here. So we're just going to sit here and ignore them, which was working fine until police decided to walk into the parking lot.

The police told us they had seen a flyer, something about the commission of a crime, and they wanted to see our IDs. We were like no.

They just started arresting people. Everybody got a little handsy, in this

group, in the dark. Which resulted in me getting another charge of assault on a LEO [Law Enforcement Officer].

When we got to the jail, I got put through the X-ray machine twice because the arresting officer thought I should have had a penis. They couldn't figure out which way I was trans.

I felt like my mug shot was pretty OK because my eyeliner was still intact after being forced to the ground by five officers. But my biggest issue was, one, we live in a society where identifying people who are arrested undoes that sense of innocence until proven guilty; two, since these protests were political in nature, it also puts a target on the backs of radicals. It effectively doxxed me.

For me, I felt like I was in danger for like two days. Then, I was like I really don't care. I was more mad that I had gotten misgendered.

For it being my first arrest, and it being a felony, I felt like my life was in ruins. It's in shambles. Two days after I got arrested — I don't even think it was a full two days — VCU reached out to me and said they were investigating me for breaking the student code of conduct. So I ended up withdrawing. It was like one thing after another after another. I couldn't focus on one thing long enough to stay mad. It was really demoralizing, at first. But I've gotten over it. It's very funny to me now.



Revolution is slow. That first night, I was like, yeah, this is going to take a long time and someone has to be there for the whole thing.

It's a sense of duty for me. It's my responsibility as an individual and as a member of this community to attempt to make a better future for the city. For me, I've worked in nonprofits. I did high school organizing. I wrote letters to governors. I've wrote to this person and that person. I went to that meeting, made these phone calls, and it was all so useless and not worth it.

As far as the police brutality goes, there hasn't been any change. The policies they did enact were lukewarm. So on that front, it felt like it was wasted, but on the other side, there is a lot of organizing that happened over the summer that is still continuing now, a year later, that is benefiting the community.

So in that sense, the protests were an extreme catalyst for those organizations to get off the ground. On that front, we did a lot and are still doing a lot.

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PATRICIA HUNTER-JORDAN ON HANOVER SCHOOL RENAMINGS, SEEKING EQUITY FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR

Just two months after losing a legal challenge in federal court, the Hanover County NAACP and its supporters saw the county School Board vote to change the names of Lee-Davis High School and Stonewall Jackson Middle School.

Some county families have always disliked the Confederate names given to the schools since they opened over 50 years ago. Local organizers and residents renewed efforts to change the names after a 2017 white supremacist rally in Charlottesville led to the death of a protester and two state police officers. School Board leaders refused then, but changed course last summer after the murder of George Floyd and weeks of protests in the Richmond area.

The Hanover School Board voted to change the names of the schools just a few weeks after Richmond took down its statues of Confederate leaders on Monument Avenue.

Patricia Hunter-Jordan, president of the Hanover NAACP branch, said the School Board's decision fulfilled a promise she made to her grandchildren: that they would not graduate from their local high school while its name still honored Confederate leaders.

As told to Times-Dispatch staff writer C. Suarez Rojas:



ALEXA WELCH EDLUND/TIMES-DISPATCH

Patricia Hunter-Jordan, the Hanover County NAACP president, promised her grandchildren that they wouldn't graduate from their local high school while its name still honored Confederate leaders.

It wasn't a shock. I hate to say it, but we've become accustomed to those types of videos and incidents. We can go back to Rodney King to see that. George Zimmerman? These things have not changed for our people. They all had the same outcome until we got to George Floyd.

The only difference that we can see in this particular point in time is social media. The fact that that young lady [Darnella Frazier] happened to be in the right place at the right time. She happened to have her phone to record what was occurring. It couldn't be denied. That's why the officer was charged and convicted. That's the difference we're seeing.

Regarding Lee-Davis High School and Stonewall Jackson Middle School, we be-

lieve that was more of a business decision than a social justice decision. The ability to attract teachers to Hanover has stalled because people don't want to come here, because of our history.

We hear people talk about tradition, 'The Hanover Way.' Those don't equate to social justice. We want a new day for our children, my grandchildren.

So in Hanover we are looking for opportunities to partner with the School Board and the Sheriff's Office. We aren't against police officers at all — we're just against the bad ones that might be in the ranks. So we want to have a conversation about that.

We also want to talk about why suspension rates are higher for African American students in our schools. We want to help bring solutions

to the table so that we can solve these issues.

They say that the more things change, the more they remain the same. In some instances we feel that what our peaceful protests brought about was a coalition of all kinds of people willing to stand beside us. It's grown. It's a pleasure to see.

But we also see another segment of people, and we've taken the approach that there's no need to deal with them if they just don't understand. We're not going to go that route with them because that is what they want. We're not going to give it to them.

We're just going to fight the battles that we need to fight and make sure that our kids are safe.

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Change

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In the months afterward, official accounts of the fallout here in Richmond were contradicted by eyewitness statements and video — the same community forces that unveiled the truth in Minneapolis and led to criminal convictions for his killer.

Many of the protesters' demands for police reform in Richmond — including defunding the police, dropping all charges against protesters and releasing the names of officers under investigation for use-of-force misconduct — have been unmet.

Mayor Levar Stoney apologized for his department's use of tear gas on peaceful protesters June 1. In a New York Times op-ed posted this past weekend that his political action committee later affixed to an email seeking donations, he said the gas was used unintentionally. His statement contradicts the video and the department's initial statement. And the tear gas didn't stop that night.

The city is forming a civilian review board to look at police misconduct, but the people in charge of the process have said the police chief won't take their calls.

The police department declined our request to talk about the past year, too.

The Richmond Times-Dispatch asked more than a dozen people — protesters, business owners and others who worked to make a difference — to share their experiences over the past year and consider what they learned, what's changed, and what hasn't.