

Schools of the Confederacy

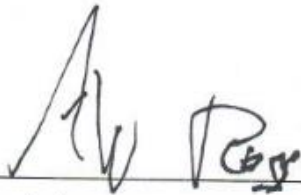
by

Kaitlynn Slaughter

A thesis submitted to the faculty at Radford University in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in the Department of Art.

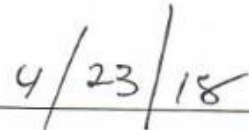
April 2018

Copyright 2018, Kaitlynn Slaughter.



Mr. Andrew Ross

Thesis Advisor

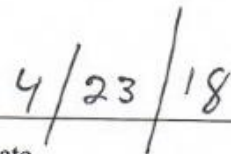


Date

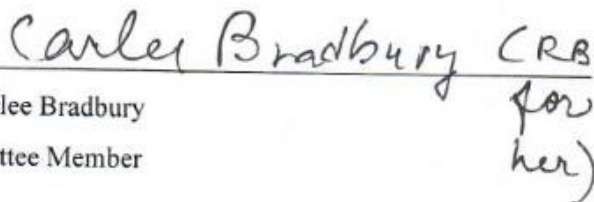


Dr. Roann Barris

Committee Member

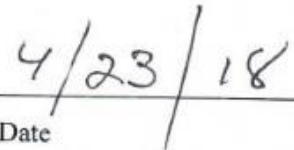


Date



Dr. Carlee Bradbury

Committee Member



Date

Introduction

As much as it pains me to say it, I am a product of the South. While my family didn't fly a Confederate flag or do anything that would be considered overly "redneck," I couldn't escape that reality. This used to be that fact about myself that could go unnoticed. I'd hide behind the façade of being a slightly-hipster, liberal college student. It wasn't until the recent controversies over the past few years surrounding the Confederate flag that I was forced out of hiding. Suddenly, when my background came up and I had to say where I was from, people stopped. "Southern Virginia" became something to be whispered, to be ashamed of. Suddenly my history became a "heritage," and I was forced to acknowledge the fact that seemingly everything I grew up with and around is a product of the Civil War. And while many argue that the war is over and part of history, it is becoming more and more clear to me that it isn't over.

And so I mediate between my past, clearly centered around "rebel culture," and my present, trying to reach some sort of reconciliation as I force myself to see and come to terms with this dark reality of Southern culture that is such a part of who I am.

In 2016, the Southern Poverty Law Center compiled a list of various monuments, roads, and schools named after Confederate leaders or events. As the catalog states, "it's difficult to live in the South without being reminded that its states once comprised a renegade nation known as the Confederate States of America. Schools, parks, streets, dams and other public works are named for its generals. Courthouses, capitals and public squares are adorned with resplendent statues of its heroes and towering memorials to the soldiers who died. U.S. military bases bear the names of its leaders. And, speckling the Southern landscape are

hundreds of Civil War markers and plaques.”¹ This statement rings true, as it is not at all a difficult task to find one or more reminders of the war in almost any town in the state. As someone who grew up in Southern Virginia, these subtle, ubiquitous reminders of our Civil War past are often overlooked, as they seem to hide in plain sight.

¹ “Whose Heritage? Public Symbols of the Confederacy,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, April 21, 2016, https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/com_whose_heritage.pdf.

The History

One aspect about photography that I feel is pivotal to its meaning is process. I have always applied this to the process of the photograph: how a camera works, how a print develops, and so forth. This process also applies, however, to the process or evolution of an idea and, in this instance, a series of ideas.

I've always been interested in the concept of place, specifically, how I fit in a particular place as an outsider, and in some cases, an insider that doesn't quite fit in. Growing up in Southern Virginia and moving even closer to what is nicknamed the "Bible Belt" of our state, I've grown increasingly interested in the more conservative culture. This interest sparked in April of 2015 when Appomattox National Park hosted the Sesquicentennial anniversary of the signing of Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House, mere minutes from my house. Thousands flocked to the multi-day reenactments and our usually sleepy, slow town was suddenly transformed into a hub for Civil War enthusiasts. It was then I realized that while I may live in this place, I have no idea what it means to be a part of this particular culture. I went to the event on the last day during a few battle reenactments and photographed the entire time. I was entranced, and I continued this reenactment series for a few years, always getting deeper into the culture's connection and respect to presenting history.

In August of 2017, a white supremacist group hosted a rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, eventually resulting in the death of a protestor and Virginia declaring a state of emergency. It was after this event that I realized there was a deeper subculture to explore in the groups fighting to keep the history of the Civil War and the names of its figureheads alive in Virginia. Sure, I had tastes of this subculture during reenactment events, but it was always masked by historical observances and rules. Yet, the parking lots outside the battlefields were always

riddled with muddied pick-up trucks bearing Confederate flags. I knew it was this culture, *these* public reminders, that needed to come next in my documentation.

After this realization, I experimented with photographing monuments, parks, and courthouses named after Confederate leaders. None of these photographs really helped me to see into this culture as I wanted to, however. None had the unique impact I was looking for, that is, until I ran into a public school named after a Confederate.

Why, I wondered, would a community name a public school for someone whose actions worked against the rights of most of the school's population? Of all the Confederate-named public places, this realization shocked me the most. And so, the *Schools of the Confederacy* was born.

The Images: Methods and Exhibition

Composition is the most important aspect of each of my photographs. My main goal is to have viewers see each school as if they themselves are actually standing right where I was when I was photographing. Having the building itself fill almost all of the frame, as well as sometimes shooting at an angle looking upwards, makes these schools look larger-than-life. In most of my images, however, I did not want to immediately draw focus to the school names. In this way, the viewer could potentially view all of the images before even realizing the relationships between the names. Hence, the message behind the entire collection of my photographs could potentially be hiding in plain sight of the viewer.

Although I used various means of photographing and printing throughout the history of this body of work, including black-and-white medium-format and 4"x5" film and darkroom printing processes, I chose to shoot digitally for the schools. Unlike a black-and-white film image, a digitally shot and printed color photograph quite clearly shows that these schools are current and not a documentation of the past.

This collective series attempts to create an atmosphere that can only be achieved by immersing the viewer in the images. For my exhibition, I chose five schools to represent both the visual and demographic diversity I find most interesting: Robert E. Lee High in Staunton, J.E.B. Stuart Elementary in Petersburg, Stonewall Jackson Middle in Roanoke, Lee-Davis High in Mechanicsville, and J.E.B. Stuart Elementary in Richmond. In choosing these five schools to display, I am showing that Confederate-named schools are not isolated to one particular area of the state. However, three of my choices (J.E.B. Stuart Elementary in Petersburg, Lee-Davis High in Mechanicsville, J.E.B. Stuart Elementary in Richmond) also display their prevalence in the counties immediately surrounding the city of Richmond.

The framed prints are 24"x36" (all horizontally depicted). I believe that this size further supports the composition choices I made while photographing, as the larger prints allow the viewer to both see the series as a whole, as well as inspect the details of each photo closely. I have represented each school as a diptych, with a 24"x16" (vertical) text panel hung alongside the main photograph, containing some of the social and economic demographics I researched. These demographics provide the viewer with insight to an area that they may not be familiar with by showing school size and racial breakdowns, National School Lunch Program data, classroom size, and common scoring on the Virginia Standards of Learning tests. The Standards of Learning scores and National School Lunch Program information is sourced directly from official spreadsheet documents published by the Virginia Department of Education.

My end-goal of this body of work is to photograph all public schools within the state of Virginia still bearing the name of Confederate figureheads and publish a book with these photos, including some history about each school and their locales; upon printing, the book would be updated with the most recent Virginia Department of Education demographic information. (Right now, all figures except National School Lunch Program statistics are based on 2016-2017 school year data.)

I'd also like to include a collection of interviews for each school from a variety of sources, including parents, school board members, past students, faculty, administration, and community members. These interviews would hopefully glean some insight on opinions of the schools and decisions on whether or not to rename the schools beyond what is shown in the media sources. This idea stems from a recent news article on Nannie Davis published by Debbie Truong from The Washington Post. In this article, Davis, one of the first Black students

who attended Lee-Davis High School in Mechanicsville, is quoted on what it felt like to be a part of the school: “‘You had to have a mind of steel,’ she said. ‘You couldn’t react to every name call, every slight. You just have to be nonviolent, non-confrontational in hopes that things would be better. That’s what you do. But it takes a toll.’”² Davis was a part of a volunteer effort to campaign for the school’s renaming, and it is community members connected to a school’s history like these that I want to incorporate in the work.

In addition to the interviews, I also plan on being present to photograph the efforts to rebrand those schools choosing to change the name. I believe the choices these schools make in the rebranding directly reflect their true stance on the issue. Will they choose, for example, to publicize the day and time the school signs will change? Or will they keep it under wraps, even completing the work at night or at an inconvenient time?

After the rebranding documentation, I plan on closing out the series by taking photos of the new signs, likely in the same format and conditions I took the previous photos, as closure on this important moment in the school’s history.

² Debbie Truong, “A Virginia Community Steeped in Civil War Lore Grapples with a Desire for Change,” *Washington Post*, accessed March 11, 2018, http://wapo.st/2p7dLj5?tid=ss_mail&utm_term=.77b463d8b3a2.

Robert E. Lee High School – Staunton, VA



Robert E. Lee High

1200 N Coalter St
Staunton, VA 24401

Total Students: 747

White: 66.5%
Black: 17.8%
Hispanic: 6.2%
Other: 0.9%

Student-to-Teacher Ratio

12:1

Socioeconomic Details

Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch: 41.8%
(Free Lunch eligibility - \$15,171 [below 130% of poverty line])

Virginia Standards of Learning Testing

Pass Rate Across all Subjects: 82%*
Highest Subject Pass Rate: English (Writing), 94%**

*Virginia Average Total Pass Rate: 81.2%

**Virginia Average English (Writing) Pass Rate: 79%

Photo Analysis

As one of the first places I visited in this body of work, I based many of my later compositional decisions on how I approached this photograph. I tried many angles, from shooting directly toward the school name signage, to standing under the covered area in front of the main doors. I eventually decided upon conveying a sense of movement, walking toward the building from the parking lot, not only seeing much of the building itself, but also giving a subtle nod to both the United States and Virginia flags flying out front.

Demographics

Based on data from 2016 reported to the Virginia Department of Education, Robert E. Lee High School is a fully accredited school with 747 total students. More than sixty-six percent (66.5%) of these students are White and 17.8% are Black. Only 35.7% are classified as economically disadvantaged.

History

The original location of Robert E. Lee High School opened in 1926 at 274 Churchville Avenue. In 1983, the school moved to its current location, replacing John Lewis Junior High School.

Current Events

A name change for Robert E. Lee High School is no new request, though in light of recent events, it is becoming more urgent. Local news source, WHSV, points out that a petition for the school to return to its original name of Staunton High School began in 2015. The school board, however, put off the petition request explaining it would revisit the issue when deciding whether or not to renovate the old school or build a new one. This was the last statement released by the district on the matter until more recent events. Early in the 2017-2018 school year, community members attended a school board meeting to debate the topic: “Like so many school districts around the country, we must see that the time of celebrating Confederate soldiers is past,” said Emily Sproul.³ Community members continued to state their case by presenting on the history of the school name. Robert E. Lee High School originated in 1926 as a Whites-only high school. Even after the schools integrated, the name remained. The school board continues to skirt around the issue, but the community members are adamant they “will continue to fight for a name change at each Staunton school board meeting until they [take action].”⁴

As a response to the continued silence of the school board, a local “craftivist” group in the area covered the school’s sign with knitted kudzu in December of 2017, symbolizing the

³ Victoria Wood, “Some Staunton Community Members Asking to Change Robert E. Lee High School’s Name,” *WHSV*, September 12, 2017, <http://www.wHSV.com/content/news/Some-Staunton-community-members-asking-to-change-Robert-E-Lee-High-Schools-name-443851013.html>.

⁴ Victoria Wood.

obsolete meaning behind honoring the Confederate soldier. As the group explains to WHSV, “the idea [is] that kudzu is linked to romantic notions about the past and revisionist Civil War history. It also said kudzu tends to grow on things that are abandoned or no longer relevant.”⁵

The school district released no statement on the matter, though the community has made it clear it will continue to fight for a name change of the area’s one high school.

⁵ Stuart, Caleb. “Craftivists’ Target Staunton School Sign with Knitted Kudzu Vines,” December 12, 2017, <http://www.wHSV.com/content/news/Craftivists-target-Staunton-school-sign-with-knitted-kudzu-vines-463680163.html>.

J.E.B. Stuart Elementary School – Petersburg, VA



J.E.B. Stuart Elementary
100 Pleasants Lane
Petersburg, VA 23803

Total Students: 556
White: 1.8%
Black: 91.2%
Hispanic: 6.7%
Other: 0.4%

Student-to-Teacher Ratio
16:1

Socioeconomic Details
Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch: 100%
(Free Lunch eligibility - \$15,171 (below 130% of poverty line))

Virginia Standards of Learning Testing
Pass Rate Across all Subjects: 66%*
Highest Subject Pass Rate: Social Studies, 89%**

*Virginia Average Total Pass Rate: 81.2%
**Virginia Average Social Studies Pass Rate: 89%

Photo Analysis

This composition differs from the other photos I chose for the exhibition. Due to the layout of the school's facade, I had to place myself physically closer to both the name signage as well as the entry doors. Instead of a straight, head-on shot, I chose to tilt my lens upward, as if I was making a quick glance at the name as I entered the building. Like the previous photograph of Robert E. Lee High in Staunton, I want the viewers to imagine themselves actually approaching the doors.

Demographics

JEB Stuart Elementary School was denied accreditation for the 2016-2017 school year. Its proficiency in reading scored at 67%, math was 57%, science was 51%, and history was the highest scoring assessment at 89%. Of the 556 students, 91.2% are Black with the next highest ethnic group as Hispanic at 6.7%. Less than two percent (1.8%) of students identified as White. In addition, 71% of students are economically disadvantaged.

History

The original J.E.B. Stuart Elementary was built in 1924, and rebuilt in 1966.

Current Events

The Petersburg School Board voted in February 2018 to change the names of the three elementary schools named after Confederate leaders. A.P. Hill, Robert E. Lee, and J.E.B. Stuart will all be renamed by July 1 with one of the main reasonings being the violent events that played out in Charlottesville at a white supremacist rally, according to School Board Chairman, Kenneth Pritchett. A.P. Hill will be changed to Cool Spring Elementary, Robert E. Lee to Lakemont Elementary, and J.E.B. Stuart to Pleasants Lane Elementary,. Despite multiple critics of the renaming, over \$20,000 has been donated in order to allow the schools to complete rebranding.

Stonewall Jackson Middle School – Roanoke, VA



Stonewall Jackson Middle

1004 Montrose Ave SE
Roanoke, VA 24013

Total Students: 598

White: 47.3%
Black: 23.1%
Hispanic: 20.4%
Other: 9.2%

Student-to-Teacher Ratio

14:1

Socioeconomic Details

Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch: 99.83%
(Free Lunch eligibility - \$15,171 [below 130% of poverty line])

Virginia Standards of Learning Testing

Pass Rate Across all Subjects: 81.4%*
Highest Subject Pass Rate: Science, 88%**

*Virginia Average Total Pass Rate: 81.2%

**Virginia Average Science Pass Rate: 82%

Photo Analysis

Photographing this building's architecture proved challenging. As I shot, all of my lines seemed to curve and slant in ways that made the building look crooked when photographed straight-on. So, instead of photographing the building's symmetry with the entrance doors in the middle of the frame, I moved my focus to the left. Using the bricks and sidewalk grooves as leading lines, I instead guide the eye to the doors, and subsequently the school's signage.

Demographics

Stonewall Jackson is a fully accredited middle school with 593 students, 23.1% of which are Black and 47.3% White. Stonewall Jackson also has a high Hispanic population at 20.1%. More than half (55.2%) of the students are economically disadvantaged.

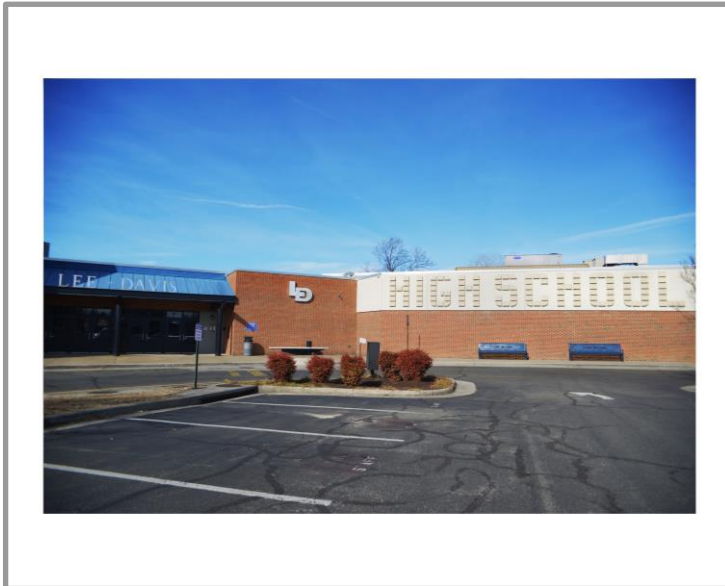
History

Stonewall Jackson Middle School opened in 1923.

Current Events

According to WDBJ7, a local news station, the Roanoke City School District created a committee to compile community opinions on renaming the middle school. Eli Jamison, a school board member, notes that many community members have expressed concern about the school's name and that leaders are "deeply invested in making this a local decision," while also "working with local police to make sure things won't get out of hand." The committee plans on meeting in March to open discussion on the topic and they also plan on creating an online survey for the community to fill out.

Lee-Davis High School – Mechanicsville, VA



Lee - Davis High

7052 Mechanicsville Pike
Mechanicsville, VA 23111

Total Students: 1,513

White: 81.2%
Black: 10.2%
Hispanic: 3.1%
Other: 5.4%

Student-to-Teacher Ratio

17:1

Socioeconomic Details

This school does not participate in the USDA National School Lunch Program (NSLP). Free and Reduced Price Eligibility data is not reported to VDOE.

Virginia Standards of Learning Testing

Pass Rate Across all Subjects: 85.4%*
Highest Subject Pass Rate: Social Studies, 90%**

*Virginia Average Total Pass Rate: 81.2%

**Virginia Average Social Studies Pass Rate: 86%

Photo Analysis

This building itself was one of the more difficult to capture - there are so many aspects that I believe are important to this image, and fitting them all within the frame was a bit of a challenge. By stepping back into the parking lot and splitting the frame almost in half horizontally, I was able to capture all of the elements I wanted, including the “Lee-Davis” text on the two benches under the “High School” signage.

Demographics

Of the 1,513 members of the student body at Lee-Davis High School, 10.2% are Black and 81.2% are White. The school is fully accredited and 9.3% of its student body is considered economically disadvantaged. Lee-Davis High School is the only school photographed that does not participate in the National School Lunch Program.

History

Lee-Davis High School was formed in March of 1959 at the height of Virginia's massive resistance against court-ordered integration by combining two other area schools, Washington-Henry High School and Battlefield Park High School. In the late 1960s, Stonewall Jackson Middle School was built on the northern end of the Lee-Davis campus. Both schools became fully integrated in 1969.

Current Events

While public debates over the names of both Lee-Davis High School and neighboring Stonewall Jackson Middle School have been a controversial issue in Hanover County for the last several years, a recent school board vote in April 2018 opted to keep the names of both schools.

J.E.B. Stuart Elementary School – Richmond, VA



J.E.B. Stuart Elementary

3101 Fendall Ave
Richmond, VA 23222

Total Students: 353

White: 1.4%
Black: 91.5%
Hispanic: 2.5%
Other: 4.6%

Student-to-Teacher Ratio

16:1

Socioeconomic Details

Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch: 99.7%
(Free Lunch eligibility - \$15,171 [below 130% of poverty line])

Virginia Standards of Learning Testing

Pass Rate Across all Subjects: 82.2%*
Highest Subject Pass Rate: Social Studies, 88%**

*Virginia Average Total Pass Rate: 81.2%

**Virginia Average Social Studies Pass Rate: 86%

Photo Analysis

Photographing this school was one of my favorite moments in this body of work. Unlike other locations I photographed, this school sits right in the middle of a narrow, residential street in downtown Richmond. There is no parking lot or bus loop that separates the school from the street. I tried shooting from several different vantage points in order to capture the grandness of the building: on the sidewalk, standing on the chain-link fence, from the top of my car. It was only when I sat in the middle of the street that I got the composition I saw in my head.

Demographics

With an enrollment of 353 students, J.E.B Stuart Elementary is a fully accredited school. Black students make up 91.5% of the student body and 1.4% are White. More than three-quarters (76.8%) of the population is economically disadvantaged.

History

J.E.B. Stuart Elementary School opened in September of 1922.

Current Events

Early in April 2018, the Richmond School Board voted 8-1 in favor of renaming J.E.B. Stuart Elementary School. The last time this was suggested was in 2003, and the voting was not in favor of changing the name. The Superintendent, Jason Kamras, suggests naming the school after civil rights attorney, Oliver Hill, who was from Richmond himself. The final decision on who the school will be named after has not yet been announced.

Conclusion

In all, I believe that this body of work is successful, and will continue to be successful as I venture forward with my future plans. The remains of our Confederate past are a controversial and sensitive topic in many aspects, and I can only see this controversy expanding as more and more locales bring forth efforts to change what many see as an attempt to hold on to an antiquated set of ideals. It is my hope that I can participate in shedding light on all facets of these issues.

Appendix A: Virginia Department of Education Terms

The following terms are used throughout each school breakdown. These term definitions are those provided by the Virginia Department of Education.

Accreditation: A process used by the Virginia Department of Education to evaluate the educational performance of public schools in accordance with Board of Education regulations.

Accreditation Denied: A school is rated Accreditation Denied if it fails to meet the requirements for full or partial accreditation for four consecutive years. Any school denied accreditation must provide parents and other interested parties the following: written notice of the school's accreditation rating; a copy of the school division's proposed corrective action plan describing the steps to be taken to raise achievement to state standards, including a timeline for implementation; and an opportunity to comment on the corrective action plan prior to its adoption.

Economically disadvantaged: A student who is a member of a household that meets the income eligibility guidelines for free or reduced-price school meals (less than or equal to 185% of Federal Poverty Guidelines).

Fully Accredited: Elementary and middle schools are Fully Accredited if students achieve adjusted pass rates on state assessments of 75% or higher in English and 70% or higher in mathematics, science, and history. High schools are Fully Accredited if students achieve adjusted pass rates of 75% or higher in English and 70% or higher in mathematics, science, and history; and attain a point value of 85 or greater based on the Graduation and Completion Index.

Partially Accredited-Reconstituted School: This rating is applied to schools that fail to meet the requirements for full accreditation for four consecutive years and receive permission from

the state Board of Education to reconstitute. A reconstituted school reverts to Accreditation Denied if it fails to meet full accreditation requirements within the agreed-upon term, or if it fails to have its annual application for Partially Accredited-Reconstituted School renewed by the state Board of Education.

Reconstitution: For a school rated accreditation denied, it is a process to initiate a range of accountability actions to improve pupil performance and to address deficiencies in curriculum and instruction; may include, but is not limited to, restructuring a school's governance, instructional program staff or student population.

Title I Improvement Status: Title I of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, authorizes financial assistance to schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards. Under the federal law, the lowest-performing Title I schools are designated as either Priority or Focus schools and are subject to specific state interventions to improve student outcomes.

Bibliography

2016-2017 School Subject-Area Passing Rates by Student Subgroup (8/15/2017). August 15, 2017. Virginia Standards of Learning School Subject Area Passing Rates by Student Subgroup, Virginia Department of Education.

2016-2017 State Subject-Area by Student Subgroup (8/15/2017). August 15, 2017. Virginia Standards of Learning Subject Area Scores, Virginia Department of Education.

2017-2018 School Level National School Lunch Program Free and Reduced Price Eligibility Report. March 14, 2018. National School Lunch Program Report by School, Virginia Department of Education.

Dyer, Geoff. "The Photographer Who Saw America's Monuments Hiding in Plain Sight." *The New York Times*. October 11, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/11/magazine/the-photographer-who-saw-americas-monuments-hiding-in-plain-sight.html>.

Stuart, Caleb. "'Craftivists' Target Staunton School Sign with Knitted Kudzu Vines." December 12, 2017. <http://www.whsv.com/content/news/Craftivists-target-Staunton-school-sign-with-knitted-kudzu-vines-463680163.html>.

Truong, Debbie. "A Virginia Community Steeped in Civil War Lore Grapples with a Desire for Change." *Washington Post*. Accessed March 11, 2018. http://wapo.st/2p7dLj5?tid=ss_mail&utm_term=.77b463d8b3a2.

"Whose Heritage? Public Symbols of the Confederacy." *Southern Poverty Law Center*. April 21, 2016. https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/com_whose_heritage.pdf.

Wood, Victoria. "Some Staunton Community Members Asking to Change Robert E. Lee High School's Name." *WHSV*. September 12, 2017. <http://www.whsv.com/content>

[/news/Some-Staunton-community-members-asking-to-change-Robert-E-Lee-High-Schools-name-443851013.html](#).