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COVER IMAGE:
Photo illustration by Doug Dobej

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OUR COMMUNITY

Where in the Bellevue?! Black Mirror Medicine for the Soul

by FAYERUZ REGAN

LET'S MEET ON THE BELLEVUE

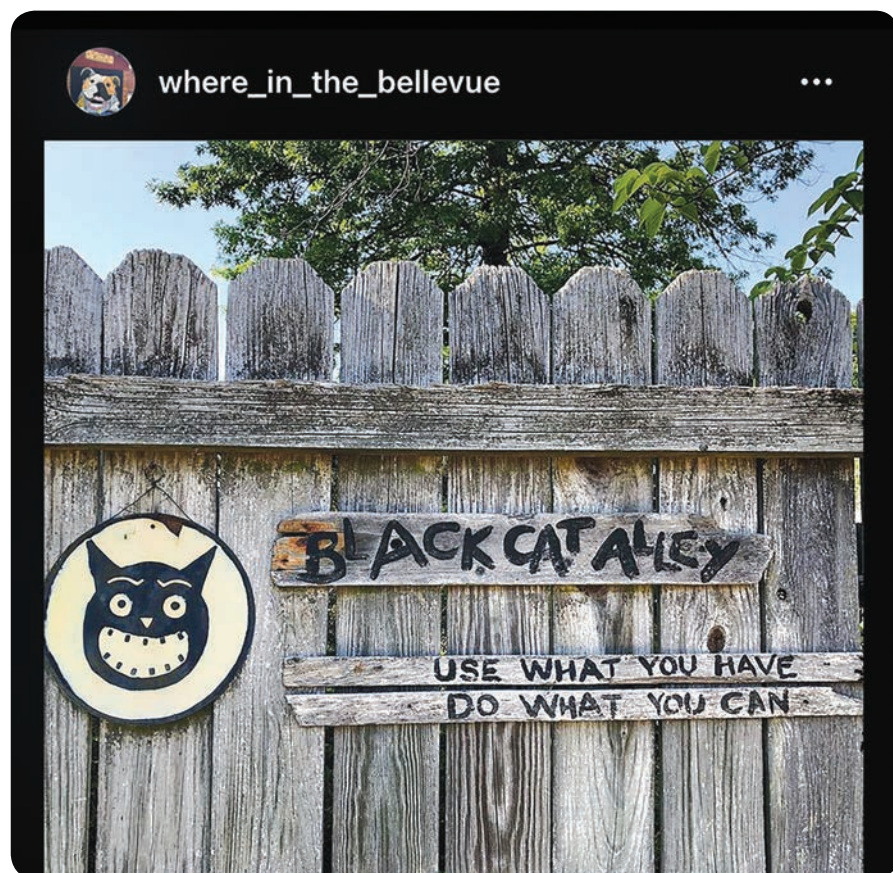
“dance floor,” they suggested. It was a euphemism of course. At the new brick patio on the corner of Fauquier and Bellevue, I was to meet the people behind Where in the Bellevue?! (@where_in_the_bellevue), the Instagram account that's been on my neighbors' lips for almost a year.

For those not familiar with the account, it celebrates our neighborhood by posting images of it. But these aren't real estate-style photos glorifying manicured lawns. They seek out hidden quirks we often overlook. Where in the Bellevue?! has soul, and urges its followers to have some too.

People who visit Bellevue regard it as a well-appointed historical neighborhood, but only residents understand the grit behind the grace. The silent bartering system in the alley, where faded furniture is left out for neighbors to repurpose. The splitting and trading of bulbs in the springtime. Neighbors hauling old roof slate in Radio Flyers, where they'll enjoy a second life as a fire pit or garden border. Folk art made from found objects. This is the world that Where in the Bellevue?! captures.

Their self-described “Corona Joy Project” was borne out of the pandemic. The first post appeared on March 30, 2020, just two weeks after schools closed and toilet paper had all but disappeared from store shelves. Before people understood the virus, before businesses knew how to reopen, we sat prostrate in our homes awaiting announcements from Governor Northam. We took to walking more, just to get out of the house. Restless children tore down the streets in a scavenger hunt for rainbows that neighbors graciously taped to their doors. Where in the Bellevue?! couldn't have come at a better time.

People began sharing photos to their Instagram stories. It became a challenge to find the butt-shaped planter (true story) or tree gnome they captured. In the comments section, people would reply, “Found!” as the profile challenges us to get out there, but not cheat by revealing locations. You'd feel pride if your own home were featured. Residents began snapping their



own photos and forwarding them to the mystery neighbors, to help with content. The profile quickly took on a community feel.

Twice I'd been asked by friends if I was secretly running the account. This further proved that like me, people were wondering who was behind it. But it's also true that we delighted in their anonymity. As far as I know, no one has confronted Where in the Bellevue?! about their identity.

I can confirm that it's a team of two people. They're neighbors, good friends, and like many people in Bellevue, from up north. One hails from Long Island, New York, the other from Northern Virginia. Like me, they attended VCU, fell in love with Richmond, and put down roots. Why did they choose Bellevue? “People here come together. Eddie over at Nutall's, even though he's been giving me the wrong lottery ticket for years, he's seen my children grow up and always asks about them.” The other mentioned, “It's the friendliness. We're not overrun with stores and restaurants. We have pockets.”

I asked if there were any changes they'd like to see in the neighborhood. “As liberal as this place is, it's pretty white. I'd like to see a little more diversity,” one answered, with the other

nodding in agreement.

They insist that they harbor no favorites, but have observed that the south side of the neighborhood (from Bellevue to Laburnum) tends to decorate more for seasons and holidays. Fauquier has the best traditional white lights, and Greycourt features the most colorful displays.

They had asked if I thought their Instagram account had brought a little happiness into people's lives. In a year like 2020, when one had to hold their breath before opening Twitter, I assured them that their account was a welcome respite. Between the global pandemic, children in cages and white supremacists marching in town squares; the churn of the news cycle was a source of anxiety that I still deemed too important to ignore. It was a relief to know that Where in the Bellevue?! was but a few taps away.

Unlike celebrity gossip or sitcoms with laugh tracks, their account doesn't exist as a distraction from the world's atrocities. It's another mirror of our society, celebrating our resilience against hate and creativity through struggle. A reminder that people are good, and that stopping to smell the roses isn't only a way to pass the time: It's the thing that just might save us.

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The First Successful Coup in the U.S. History

by JACK R. JOHNSON

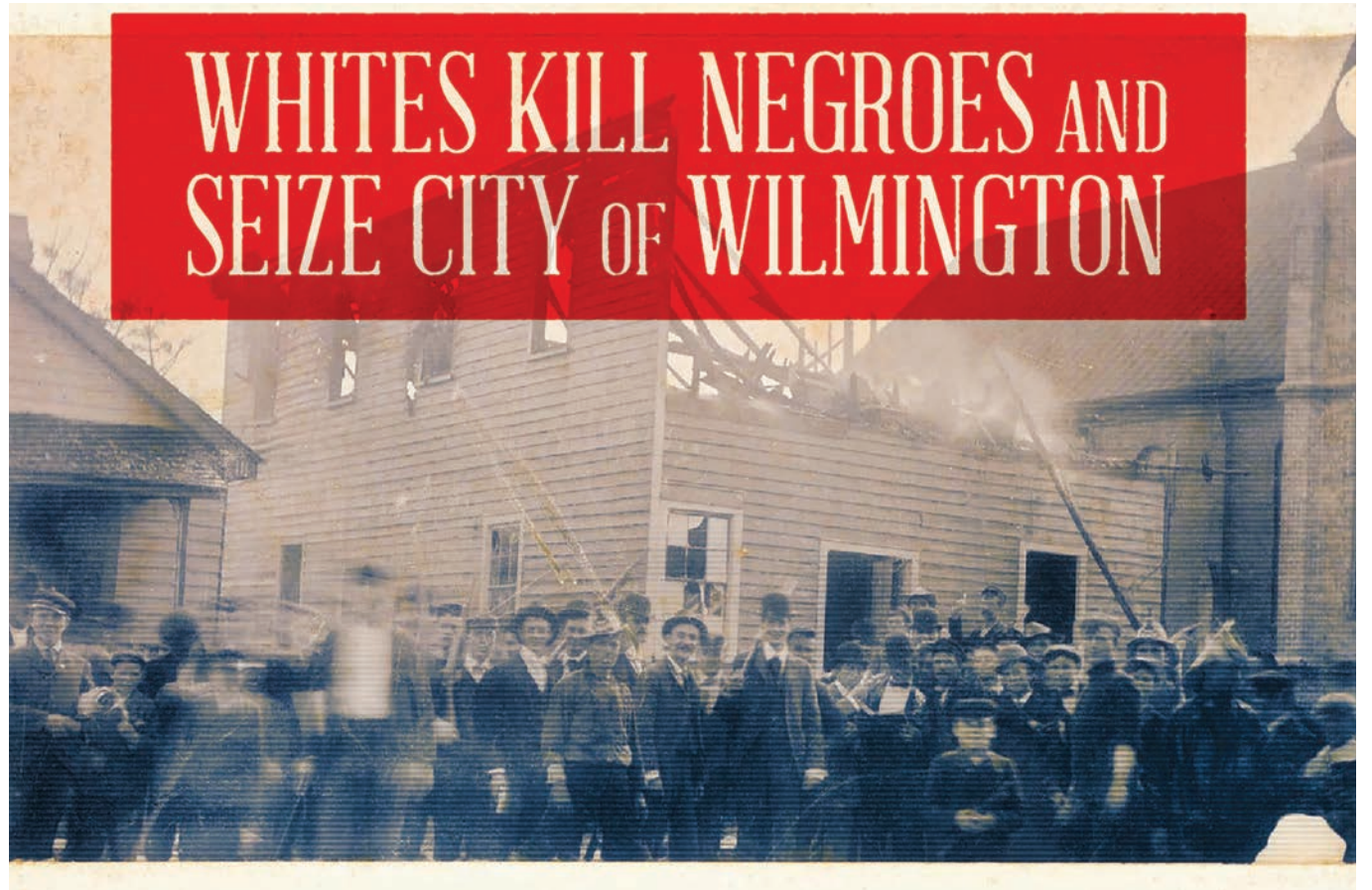
ONE REASON the recent coup attempt in Washington DC was such a shock is that no one really thought it could happen here. We prefer to think of coups as the province of banana republics, happening in far off locales, riddled with corrupt leaders and nepotistic dynasties. Of course they do happen here, as we saw on January 6 with the aborted coup at the U.S. Capitol. But there was another coup in our history which occurred in 1898 in Wilmington, North Carolina. That one, unfortunately, was successful.

The superficial gloss is that the North Carolina coup came about because of racial tensions, but an accurate reading shows that the underlying causes were really about the loss of money and power for the white elite of the day. The white elite merely inflamed racial tensions to drive the coup forward.

In southeastern North Carolina, on the outskirts of Wilmington, poor white cotton farmers, fed up with big bank financing and railroad company corruption allied with recently freed Black Republicans to form what was called a 'Fusion' coalition. They formed an interracial alliance with a platform of self-governance, free public education, and equal voting rights for Black men. Wisely, the Fusionist platform also called for restricting interest rates to six percent. With 90 percent of North Carolinians in debt, this turned out to be favorable political move, and they successfully won elections.

The shift in political power was a direct challenge to the old white plantation system rule, and the so called 'lending' class.

By late 1897, nine prominent Wilmington men were unhappy with what they called "Negro Rule". They were particularly aggrieved about Fusion government reforms that affected their ability to manage the city's affairs. Worse, when interest rates were lowered, it decreased banking revenue. Tax laws were adjusted, directly affecting stockholders and property owners who now had to pay a "like proportion" of taxes on the property they owned. Railroad regulations were tightened, making it more difficult for those who had railroad holdings to capitalize on them.



According to historian Newsome Lefler, newly elected Democratic State Party Chairman Furnifold Simmons was tasked with developing a strategy for the Democrats' 1898 campaign. A student of Southern political history, Simmons knew that racial resentment was easy to inflame and would cut across party lines. He took the advice of Marion Butler writing in his newspaper, *The Caucasian*:

"There is but one chance and but one hope for the railroads to capture the net [sic] legislature, and that is for the n***er to be made the issue."

White 'clubs' for labor and politics began taking shape. These were clubs whose sole organizing principle was white supremacy. Paramilitary wings of the Democratic Party, such as the Red Shirts, took up the work of the Ku Klux Klan, which had been subdued by the federal government. There was much talk of the Negro taking advantage of the white woman, and the white supremacists used an editorial by Alex Manly, the editor of Wilmington's black newspaper the *Daily Record*, to stir a firestorm at the time of the elections.

Manly had responded to a speech by a Georgia socialite who promoted lynching as a method "to protect

woman's dearest possession from the ravening human beast." Manly condemned lynching and pointed out that relations between the races were more often than not consensual. In other words, the notion that these relationships were crimes of rape was spurious nonsense. According to Manly, these were simply affairs of the human heart. This was more than the white supremacists could stand. They demanded that the paper be shut down.

In another example, Democratic Congressman Alfred Waddell declared:

"We will never surrender to a ragged raffle of Negroes, even if we have to choke the Cape Fear River with carcasses."

This kind of rhetoric was typical of the white supremacist clubs across the state. There was talk of "shotgun politics" to oust elected Black Republicans. Shortly after Waddell's speech, there was a political convention in Goldsboro dubbed the "White Supremacy Convention." It was attended by 8,000 people. There, Major William Guthrie promised, "Resist our march of progress and civilization and we will wipe you off the face of the earth." The convention was hailed in *The Fayetteville Observer* as "A White Man's Day."

Right before the election, the Red Shirts were told by Democratic leader-

ship that they wanted the Democrats to win the election "at all hazards and by any means necessary ... even if they had to shoot every Negro in the city."

The ending was as predictable as the more recent calls to overthrow our Capitol.

On election eve, a *Washington Post* correspondent noted: "The city might have been preparing for a siege instead of an election ... Military preparations, so extensive as to suggest assault from some foreign foe. [...] The whites had determined to regain their supremacy; and the wholesale armament was intended to convey to the blacks an earnest of this decision."

White police stood by as nightriders burst into Black homes in and around Wilmington, whipping Black men and threatening to kill them if they dared register to vote. On Election Day in November 1898, vigilantes beat Black voters and stuffed ballot boxes in full view of white policemen.

A *Washington Post* correspondent noted, "No one for a moment supposes that this was the result of a free and untrammelled ballot; and a Democratic victory here, as in other parts of the State, was largely the result of the suppression of the Negro vote."

Democrats won every seat, but these were state legislative seats. Blacks still maintained power in Wilmington's city government.

The white clubs could not abide this.

According to The Zinn Education Project, some 800 white citizens led by Waddell met at the county courthouse and produced what was called, the "White Declaration of Independence" which stated: "We, the undersigned citizens... do hereby declare that we will no longer be ruled, and will never again be ruled by men of African origin."


The following day — November 10 — Waddell led a mob of 2,000 armed men to the Daily Record and burned the building to the ground. In the confusion, someone fired a shot, and someone else yelled, "One white man killed," and the armed white supremacists opened fire.

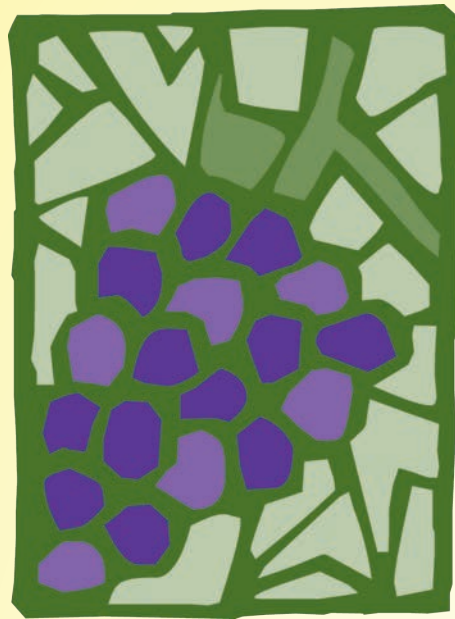
According to Time magazine, the coup leaders pressured the governor to call out the militias — the National Guard of the day — on the pretext that Blacks were rioting, but it was whites who were rioting, directed by soldiers and police. They led white vigilantes on a killing spree.

Death estimates range wildly, from 60 to 300 Blacks, or more. As part of the coup, white supremacists banished leading Black and white political allies from Wilmington after forcibly evicting them from office and replacing them with coup leaders. Militiamen escorted them to the train station at gunpoint. In the weeks after the coup, more than 2,100 Blacks fled Wilmington, turning a Black-majority city into a white supremacist citadel.

Laura Edwards wrote in Democracy Betrayed (2000): "What happened in Wilmington became an affirmation of white supremacy not just in that one city, but in the South and in the nation as a whole."

After the coup, no Black citizen served in public office in Wilmington until 1972. No Black citizen from North Carolina was elected to Congress until 1992. No one was prosecuted or punished for the killings and violence. It was, according to Time magazine, the most successful and lasting coup in American history. "Two years before the coup, 126,000 Black men registered to vote in North Carolina. Four years after the coup, the number was 6,100."

So when people say things like "A successful coup can't happen here," the correct response is, "It already has." 





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IN MEMORIAM

Sheila Kavanagh Mandt 1965-2021

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

SHEILA KAVANAGH Mandt, who was born at St. Vincent's Hospital in New York City, passed away January 25 of complications due to COVID-19. She was 55 years old, and had been married to former Third District City Councilman Chris Hilbert for the past 25 years.

"She was the strongest and most generous person I have ever met," Chris told me. "Her seventeen-year battle with various ailments as a result of being as exposed to mold was remarkable. Doctors had written her off several times. And she survived all of it. During the calendar years of 2013 and 2014 she was in the hospital for over three hundred days. She was absolutely the strongest person I know. All of her doctors were amazed at her strength and determination and amazing will to live."

Her strength was complemented by her magnanimity. "She had a profound generosity of spirit," said Chris. "If someone admired something, she took note of that and sent it to them if she could." When a former Richmond mayor visited the Hilbert home and remarked on the pleasant scent of the environment, Shelia sent him a box of the scented candles she used. Sheila was known as the consummate hostess of Richmond's Northside.

Sheila, from the time she and her husband moved to Richmond in 1995, was a community activist. One of her passions was advocacy for domestic violence survivors. "She was a huge supporter of President Biden way back in the nineties when he was championing the Violence Against Women Act" Chris recalled. "And I am grateful that she saw him inaugurated. She had always cared deeply about Joe Biden."

Back in 2002, Shelia contacted every domestic violence shelter in Virginia—more than 150 of them, according to Chris. She asked each shelter to create a separate cloth patch that would later be stitched into a giant quilt.

"Sheila got a grant of \$25,000 from Philip Morris to hire a seamstress to sew the whole thing together," said Chris.




Sheila Kavanagh Mandt

The finished product was gargantuan. "It stretched from the entrance to the library of Virginia, all the way across the lobby and all the way up the stairs," Chris said. "It was huge."

Today, a large panel of Shelia's quilt hangs in the lobby of the Virginia Attorney General's Office on 9th Street in downtown Richmond.

Sheila always loved animals. The first dog she and Chris adopted was rescue dog named Bailey who lived for seventeen years. "The dog that we have now was from the SPCA and is named Scout," said Chris. "Sheila had great admiration for Robin Starr and the phenomenal organization (Richmond SPCA) she runs."

Sheila was predeceased by her parents, Ann and Edward; and her sister, Maura Mandt. She is survived by her husband, Chris; and his sisters, Debbie (Mike) Beard and Sandra (Joel) McKinney; and brother, David Hilbert; and nieces, Melanie (Glen) and Shannon (Andy) Nelson. Sheila is also survived by her brothers, Neil and Michael; her sisters-in-law, Lauren and Diana; and her nieces, Grace Ann and Charlotte Lynn Mandt. 

A memorial service won't be held until November 3—Sheila's birthday. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Richmond SPCA at 2519 Hermitage Road, Richmond, VA 23220 or online at richmondspca.org.

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BOOK REVIEW

Nobody's Child: A Tragedy, a Trial, and a History of the Insanity Defense

by **FRAN WITHROW**

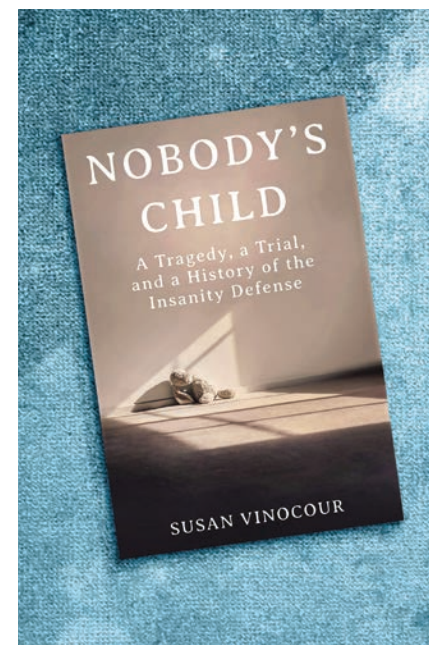
DOROTHY DUNN (not her real name) certainly seems guilty. There on the floor lies her three-year old grandson, dead. Did he fall or did Dunn kill him? Raymie has been dead for three days, is malnourished, has bruises on his head and body, and bears ligature marks around his ankle. Did Dunn abuse and then murder her grandson? If so, was Dunn insane at the time?

Dunn is arrested, handcuffed in front of her other children, and assigned a public defender, who asks this book's author, Susan Vinocour, to determine whether Dunn is a candidate for the insanity defense.

Vinocour, a psychologist (and victim of child abuse herself), performs mental evaluations for the court, and is prepared to loathe Dunn. Raymie's death is horrid, and Dunn has a flat, unemotional tone and an unappealing personality. After spending many hours with her; however, Vinocour has a change of heart. Perhaps all is not as it seems at first glance.

Over time, Vinocour learns that Dunn herself is the victim of abuse. She received only a sparse education and has limited intellectual skills. Race, prejudice, and poverty add to the uphill battles she faces. She is struggling to raise not only her own children (only one of whom seems to have avoided the family's intellectual challenges) but is also forced by social workers to care for Raymie. Raymie was born prematurely to Dunn's oldest daughter. Because Dunn's daughter is addicted to cocaine, Raymie was too, and he now suffers from a variety of mental and behavioral difficulties. Dunn's description of how she struggles to care for this little boy is heartrending. She attempts to keep him safe despite her scant skills and chronic exhaustion, but these, added to her lack of money and any kind of support, all conspire to come to a deadly end.

Vinocour uses Dunn's case to explore the history of the insanity defense and how it has changed (and remains the same) despite our ever increasing un-



derstanding of the brain and how it works. She goes beyond talking about the legal definition of insanity to explain that the larger system fails Dunn repeatedly both as a child herself and as an adult. The school system, social services, and child advocacy workers all had the potential to save Dunn from her desperate plight, and by doing so, to save Raymie as well. Vinocour's account is both sobering and enlightening.

Dunn is sent to trial, and Vinocour describes with clarity ways the current legal system works against defendants. Prosecutors wield enormous power; judges can have their own biases, jurors are often not told the whole story, medical experts can be prevented from sharing everything they know. Overworked and understaffed public defenders cannot spend the time necessary to properly defend the accused. Even the persuasive abilities of the attorneys can affect the outcome of a trial.

This is the troubling story of a woman who remains resilient despite everything life throws at her. Is she insane? Or is our legal and social services system? **NJ**

Nobody's Child: A Tragedy, a Trial, and a History of the Insanity Defense
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Y

ET, IT WAS ALSO A YEAR THAT invited us to peer through corrective lenses which forced us to see the world in sharp focus, giving us perfect vision, perhaps for the first time in our history.

JUST DAYS AFTER 2020 WAS born, Sydney and Canberra, Australia recorded their highest temperatures ever. Triple-digit temperatures continued to bake the continent down under, and wildfires that had begun the previous June raged uncontrolled, particularly in Victoria and New South Wales. These flames consumed more than 45 million acres. To put that number in perspective—that's about the size of South Dakota or Washington state. The unprecedented amount of smoke from these fires, ushered along by the wind, actually circumnavigated the globe.

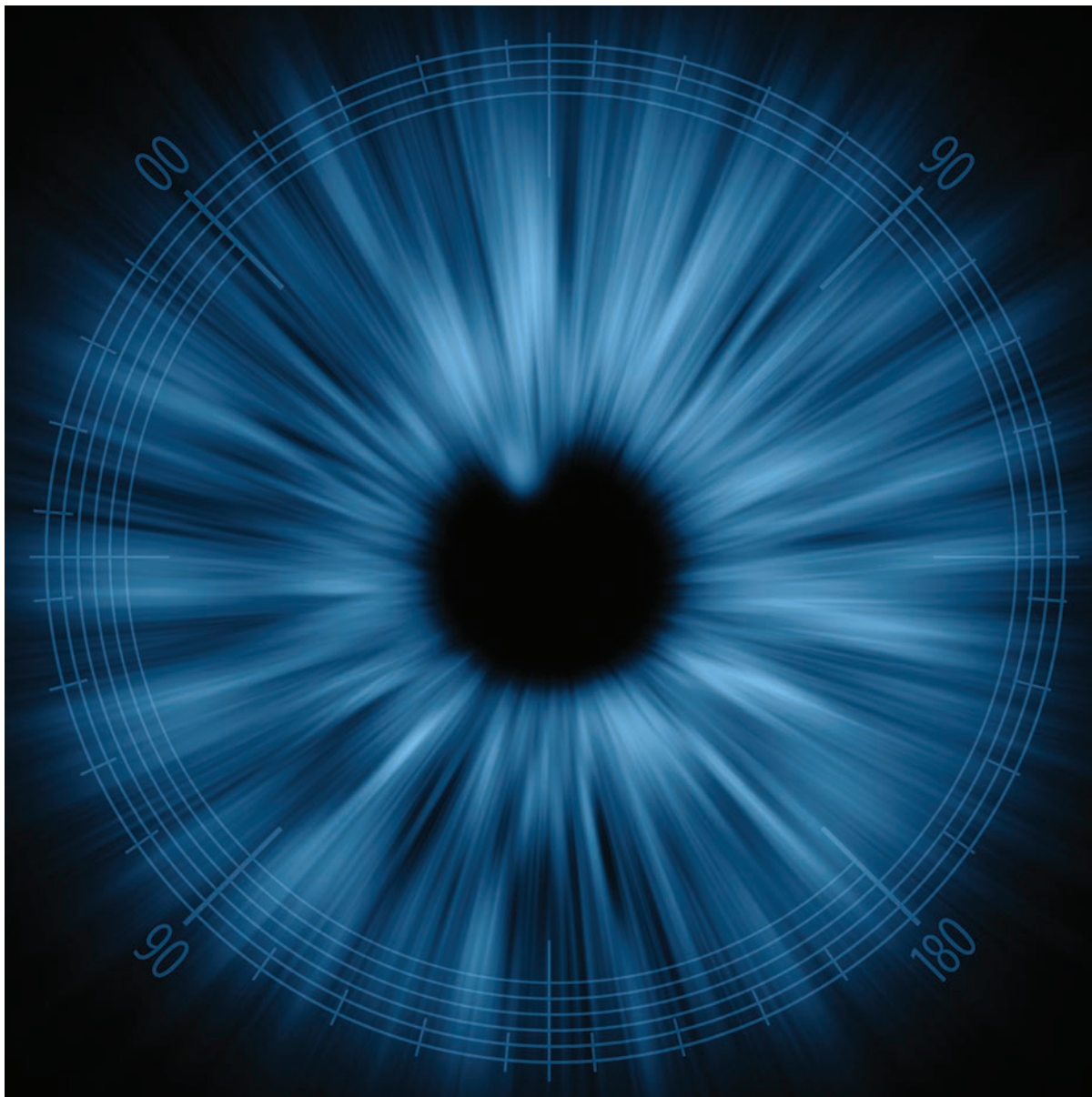
The odd thing about those brush fires and forest fires, too, is that they were so large in scope and magnitude that they created their own weather systems. Above the flames hovered pyrocumulonimbus clouds that trap heat, while generating strong winds and abundant lightning strikes which sparked even more fires. Downright apocalyptic. When the smoke finally cleared in March, the wildfires in Australia had killed or displaced nearly 3 billion animals, and utterly consumed untold numbers of irreplaceable ecosystems.

And here in the United States, California was literally in flames. More than 9,000 forest fires across The Golden State consumed well over four million acres, which is about the size of Connecticut. It would go down as the worst fire season in California's history, burning more than twice as much land as the 2018 fires. Those fires in 2020, included five of the six largest wildfires ever recorded.

The sitting president, at one of his rallies in August, made an idiotic claim, indicating he had never walked through a forest in his life, had never waded through piles of decaying leaves and branches that nurture the trees they fall from. "You gotta clean your floors, you gotta clean your forests," he said. "There are many, many years of leaves and broken trees and they're like, like, so flammable, you touch them and it goes up." This man later rejected California's request for a major disaster declaration linked to the Creek Fire and five other catastrophic blazes. Ultimately the funding went through.

The undeniable culprit behind the wildfires was global climate change. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) called 2020 the hottest year in recorded history. Their analyses found that Earth's global average temperature last year was 1.84 degrees warmer than the baseline average spanning a thirty period in the latter part of the 20th century.

by **CHARLES MCGUIGAN**



“This was the warmest decade in the historical record, without any question whatsoever,” according to Gavin Schmidt, director of NASA’s Goddard Institute for Space Studies.

And over at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), 2020 and 2016 were ranked the two hottest years on record. Global temperatures over land and sea were 1.76 degrees above average, according to NOAA. This too: the last seven

years are the warmest in Earth’s recorded history.

Despite the overwhelming evidence, the former president, who has consistently denied scientific fact, removed the United States from the Paris Agreement. The new Commander in Chief, President Joe Biden, a true leader who lends his ear to scientific experts and not anti-science quacks, just hours after he was sworn in, reentered our country in this international pact committed to reducing



Left: Dr. Chris Gough, associate professor of biology at VCU, doing field work.



Right: Bo Lusk, a coastal scientist with TNC who heads up marine restoration projects, with a cluster of oysters.

greenhouse gas emissions responsible for heating up the planet.

Whether we acknowledge it or not, we are engaged in the most expansive war in human history, and it is occurring on every continent. Unlike all previous wars, this is a global conflict against the very planet we all call home. Fortunately, we have forces on air, land and sea to combat these assaults. These forces are armed with reason and truth and a deep love for all life. Scientists are the generals and the admirals and the field officers in this conflict, fighting the battle for our planet on 10,000 fronts simultaneously. The enemies in this global war are greed and ignorance, those who prefer wealth over life, and those who deny facts. And the soldiers are each one of us, and we will have to make conscious decisions if we hope to achieve victory.

“I’m alarmed by the rate of recorded change and the lack of action in response,” said Dr. Christopher Gough, an associate professor of biology at VCU. “I have, I think, some hope in that we are gathering lots of information that’s useful to inform how we might respond to these changes. The question is will we respond, and will politicians respond, and how will they use this information?”

After a short pause, Christopher quoted a line often attributed to Mark Twain. “History never repeats itself, but it often rhymes,” he says. “There is a precedent for inaction, and it usually doesn’t end well. It doesn’t end well economically, or in any other way.”

The day before I interviewed Christopher, Greta Thunberg, the 16-year old environmental activist from Sweden, addressed the United Nations, excoriating world leaders for doing little or nothing at all about global climate change. At the mention of her name, Christopher nodded.

“I think we need to have young people who are motivated and informed to respond to the environmental issues of the day,” he said. “And what resonates with me is Greta’s statement that there’s so much inaction despite our knowledge and understanding of what’s happening at the moment to the environment and the climate.”

Shortly after that interview, my daughter Catherine, who is both artist and environmental scientist, and I struck out for one of the most carefully studied ecosystems on the planet, and had it not been for the efforts of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) over the past fifty years, it would have been destroyed beyond reclamation by greedy developers and other money-obsessed enemies of the Earth. Today, it is a working laboratory of environmental science that shares its knowledge with the entire world. And it is a success story of what can happen when an entire community, led by a team of committed scientists, join together to combat environmental degradation.

This system of barrier islands, seaside bays and riparian lands runs the length of the Eastern Shore of Virginia. Jill Bieri, executive director of TNC’s Virginia Coast Reserve hosted us, and ferried us off to the barrier islands with a team of scientists.

“The sea is rising,” Jill told us. “Six times a year the road at Brownsville is completely underwater. And on the south end of Brownsville, there’s no farming there anymore it’s gotten so low. People here

have seen it happen over their lifetimes. They do know it's changing. Something's happening. Their docks are underwater, or there's a road they can't access."

For the past forty years, less than a decade after TNC started its program on the Eastern Shore, the Virginia Shore Reserve has been a part of UNESCO's (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) Man and the Biosphere Programme.

"We were one of the first sites around the world designated as part of this UN program," Jill said. "The program's about protecting lands and waters, and then having those lands and waters be used sustainably to help local economies. So, it's really very analogous to the goals of The Nature Conservancy."

The previous administration, known for its limited understanding of global climate change, refused to recognize the Virginia Coast Reserve's membership in UNESCO. "But we still are part of one of seven hundred sites around the world that belong to that organization," said Jill. "We're connected to the world. It would be really easy to think, what I have done for the last thirty years of my career? Is all for naught because of what's going on right now? But I don't feel that way. This is just a blip, and I believe this is where I need to be because I think we are a global organization that can take the science and answer these questions, help to make policy changes and bring the right people to the table. That's why I'm upbeat."

I could hear it in her voice, and see it in her eyes, which flashed with limbic sparks. "It goes along with what you said earlier about me, that I'm optimistic," says Jill. "And I am, because we're doing stuff every single day. There's a lot of doom and gloom, and you see the data and, you know, if carbon levels get to this level at a certain point, we're at a point of no return. But we're not there yet, and so let's keep really focusing on the positive."

JUST THREE WEEKS into 2020, more than 20,000 heavily armed men, and a few women, descended on the State Capitol.

Early that morning a biting and bitter wind whipped along Franklin Street as I made my way with a couple of reporters and photographers down to Capitol Square. As we neared 9th Street, the crowd thickened, and we each went our separate ways. To blend

in, I accepted a blaze orange sticker that read, "Guns Save Lives". I slapped it on the left breast of my jacket so I could move freely among the throng of angry white men.

For the next four hours I nudged my way through a mass of people, many of whom wore camouflage and facial coverings of one kind or other, though a couple months later they would be whining about wearing face masks. And this, too: almost all of them sported beards—the old, the young, the thin, the stout. Most of them sported holstered side arms. Many strapped AR-15s (the choice of weapon for mass murders in this country) to their chests. They pledged allegiance, and sang of a star-spangled banner, though many of them carried other flags, those of the Three-Percenter or the Tea Party or state flags or black flags or red flags. Flags seemed particularly popular with these people. One of the most prevalent was the flag of the traitors and insurrectionists who fought to preserve the enslavement of Black people more than a hundred and fifty years ago, a flag as offensive as the banner of the Third Reich.

Throughout the morning as I wandered among the crowd of armed protesters, it was impossible to walk more than five feet without hearing one of them shouting anti-Semitic slogans, or threatening the lives of our governor and elected officials, or using the "n" word. This was particularly disheartening, because while the grown men in their cowboy jammies ranted, real Americans were honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., one of America's greatest heroes shot to death in the prime of his life by a cowardly white supremacist who could not cut the muster in the U.S. Army.

On the corners and the sidewalks, men and women sold various items—T-shirts featuring the sitting president flipping twin birds, MAGA caps, scarves, face masks, and so on. It was a cross between Comic-Con with warrior cosplayers, and a state fair without amusements on the midway. But the comparisons ended there. These were angry men—white supremacists, neo-Nazis, modern-day Kluckers—who called to mind the violent hordes that invaded Charlottesville a couple years earlier, and foreshadowed a despicable act of domestic terrorism at the U.S. Capitol within the coming year.

To say the least, it was surreal. I walked three hours through this crowd, up 9th to Broad, back to 7th,



Flags and banners.

over to Franklin and back to 9th, then up Grace to 7th, and over to Broad and down 9th again. I would always stop at 9th and Broad Streets to watch the protestors step down from the buses. Six buses would pull up on the east side of 9th next to City Hall, and another six would pull up on the west side of the street. The passengers would file out and make their way over to Broad, where they were diverted west to 8th Street. When the twelve empty buses pulled off 9th Street, another twelve packed buses would take their places. That went on for more than three hours, and by the end of it, almost 22,000 protestors had been deployed.

Thankfully, there was no violence that day. But had it not been for the FBI, things might have turned out differently. Just days before the gun rally, the FBI arrested a number of white supremacists who had intended to commit violent acts. One of them talked about using a thermal imaging scope on his rifle to ambush unsuspecting civilians and police officers. "I need to claim my first victim. If there's like a PoPo cruiser parked on the street and he doesn't have backup, I can execute him at a whim and just take his stuff."

Another wrote this: "We could essentially like be literally hunting people. You could provide over watch while I get close to do what needs to be done to certain things."

Still another looked on the rally as a powder keg that required just a single spark to ignite. "And the thing is you've got tons of guys who . . . should be radicalized enough to know that all you gotta do is start making things go wrong and if Virginia can spiral out to [expletive] full-blown civil war."

BY MID-MARCH OF 2020, intelligent Americans were finally accepting the reality of the 2019 novel coronavirus. Yet despite the scientific evidence, the sitting president refused to take action, even though he had earlier acknowledged the severity of COVID-19. In an interview with Bob Woodward on February 7, the former president said that the coronavirus was "deadly stuff" transmitted by air, a threat "more deadly" than the flu. Due to his inaction, and denial of science, hundreds of thousands of Americans needlessly died on his watch. Among other things, he silenced the experts—notably Dr. Anthony Fauci, who heads up the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases at the National Institutes of Health, and is recognized worldwide as a leading expert on infectious diseases. Dr. Fauci and his colleagues, among them Dr. Deborah Birx, continued to tell the science-informed truth, even as their "boss" lied and spread groundless conspiracy theories, recommended unproven protocols, and refused to wear a face mask. Because of the lack of leadership in the Oval Office, front-line workers—the men and women who daily put their lives at risk in combating this pandemic—were left without even a bare minimum of protection. Back in late March, I had the honor of interviewing a man who has served his country in times of war, and times of peace. Here's what I wrote:

Leigh Carter and millions of other health care workers were toiling day and night to combat COVID-19, but they were woefully short on supplies. Even in medical facilities that care for our veterans.

The film Gallipoli, which came out back in the 1980s, ends with a notori-

ous event that occurred during World War One. The allies were trying desperately to gain ground, and the no man's land between them and their Ottoman Empire enemies was sometimes no more than thirty feet wide. West Australians were dug in, and though they did not have any ammunition, they were ordered to charge the Turks with just their fixed bayonets. Minutes later, just as they rose out of the trenches, they were mowed down, three hundred of them, many of them just boys under eighteen years old.

Today, on the front lines and in the trenches, we have millions of soldiers who are running short of ammunition in a war against a virus unlike anything the world has seen in more than a century. Nurses, doctors, orderlies and other healthcare providers are waging battle on a thousand fronts simultaneously. But their supplies are running short, even in federal medical facilities where the population is particularly susceptible to the novel coronavirus.

Leigh Carter is a combat veteran. He served in the first Gulf War as a field radio operator in reconnaissance, and as a tactical air control party leader. In all, he spent six years in the United States Marine Corps.

These days he is again risking his life every day. Leigh is a registered nurse in the ER at McGuire VA Hospital here in Richmond, Virginia. And things there are not good, because, like elsewhere, COVID-19 is an ever-present threat, and basic medical supplies, specifically personal protective equipment, or PPE, are in short supply.

Due to shortages, some protocols have been altered, at least temporarily. "The policies have been bent because of a

lack of PPE, and a lot of the things that we'd been doing that were strict are a lot simpler," Leigh said. "It's not the most optimal conditions to be treating patients, let alone keeping us safe."

Chief among the very basic protective gear that these men and women in the healthcare professions need are N95 respirator masks. These are designed as single use facemasks. But healthcare workers are using them multiple times.

"I have one that I used for four straight days," Leigh told me. "The fourth day I had it on, it was still moist when I came back the next morning, clearly degraded."

The scarcity of these very basic safeguards was so intense that Leigh's boss kept them under lock and key.

"The nurse manager is locking up these things in her room, in her office," said Leigh. "She's doing a great job, doing the best she can to stretch the PPE out because we are limited if not on the brink of not having any."

Amid this epidemic, Leigh has seen another virus spread across the internet in the form of outright lies and misinformation. And one of the super spreaders was the sitting president.

"The multiple posts I'm seeing on social media of misinformation being spread around does everyone a disservice," Leigh said. "When you tout your knowledge that's ill-informed, you do yourself and everybody else a disservice, and you're just prolonging this process. You know, I try to walk the fine line in politics especially looking at the VA and being ex-military, but this guy doesn't understand clear communication, how to make people feel safe, confident in which direction we're headed and it's

clear among administration at the VA, it's clear among the management there that information's not being disseminated in a clear fashion. It's important, and we're not getting that."

Leigh sometimes gets tired of hearing people complain about having to be pent up in their own homes, and he does not understand, contrary to what science tells us, that there are still people who insist on gathering in large groups. He'd like to remind everyone that not all of us are fortunate enough to be holed up in a safe home, insulated from this hideous pathogen.

"My ex-wife is a nurse at Chippenham, and I have a four-year old daughter," he said. "We share custody and we're going through this every day so the posts that we hear about how horrible it is that you're imprisoned. Think about that. Think about what we're doing every day. I have two twelve-hour shifts starting tomorrow. Meanwhile, people are complaining about having to stay at home. So, just try to take pause and think about those people that are consistently out doing that and we're all suffering this together."

As the highest elected office in the land continued to fail the American public, stalwart members of Congress vehemently opposed the former president's consistent denial of the deadly pandemic. In the past, the former president compared this novel coronavirus with the seasonal flu, suggesting it would miraculously disappear. And in late April, he made an absolutely absurd claim that bright light and injected disinfectants might be possible remedies for COVID-19.

Senator Tim Kaine of Virginia—a man of the people, a man of faith and compassion who seeks the North Star of an ever more perfect Union even during this global pandemic and these divisive times—was good enough to take time out of a very busy schedule to talk with me in mid-May.

We met at his home in Ginter Park which he shares with his wife Anne Holton. He sat on the top step of his porch and was dressed in faded blue jeans and a maroon knit shirt. It was just days after armed Trump supporters stormed the Michigan Capitol in Lansing. Senator Kaine talked about that incident because the state house in Michigan was closed the day of the interview due to threats made against Governor Gretchen Whitmer.

"The archetypal picture recently is the one of the people in the Michigan Capitol yelling in the faces of State Police," he said. "And you think about somebody with no mask on



Senator Tim Kaine with harmonica.

who potentially has coronavirus intentionally trying to infect somebody by standing six inches away and yelling in their face. I'm outraged when I see those pictures."

And then he addressed the pandemic. "Anthony Fauci is an expert," Tim said. "And we've got other experts who are doing really good work in the federal government. The Trump team has some really sharp people." Having said that, Tim quickly added, "I think the Trump administration has horribly mishandled this because there's no conceivable reason why the United States, which had our first case the same day that South Korea did, now has eighty plus thousand deaths, and South Korea has had two hundred and fifty. By early March we were still the same, our unemployment rates were still the same. Now South Korea's unemployment rate is at four percent, and ours is at fifteen percent. They pursued a strategy that was very different than the strategy that was pursued in this country."

He recalled those early, critical weeks, when every minute counted in containing a virus that spread like pollen in Richmond springtime. "For six to eight weeks," said Tim. "We had a commander in chief/president saying, 'It's not a problem. It will go away. Democrats and the media are blowing it out of proportion. We've got five cases, they'll be gone by the end of month. It will get better when the weather gets warm. You could inject disinfectant.' He downplayed the risk, and then preached a lot of nonsense about it. If you've got good advice coming from Dr. Fauci, but then the president, who has a much louder microphone, countering it, then you're going to find our response isn't as good."

Tim mentions a particularly bizarre occurrence that had emanated from the White House.



Leigh Carter.

“I think it was three Thursdays ago,” he said. “President Trump did a press conference and he rolled out with his team the three phases to reopen our economy.”

Tim and the rest of Virginia’s federal delegation were on a conference call with Governor Ralph Northam.

“So you were on the call with the president when he was announcing it, what do you think?” Tim asked the governor.

“Science-based, sound, we’re going to follow it,” Governor Northam said.

Tim was pleasantly surprised that the federal guidelines were in keeping with a strategy endorsed by scientific experts and a governor who is also a doctor.

But then of course the crazy tweeting began early the very next morning.

“President Trump is tweeting out ‘Liberate Virginia, liberate Michigan, liberate Wisconsin,’” said Tim. “Governors are trying to apply the guidelines that he had given less than twelve hours before. And President Trump is trying to foment insurgency in the midst of a global pandemic. It’s shocking. You cannot look any Virginian or American in the face with a death toll now north of eighty thousand and climbing, and say it had to be this way. Because the experience of other nations in the world show, no, to the contrary. We have forty-five times the death rate in South Korea, three times the death rate in Germany, twice that in Canada, dozens of times the death rate in Australia or Japan or Vietnam or New Zealand.”

Tim was impressed by the leadership of our governors—Republican and Democrat alike. “Mike DeWine in Ohio, Larry Hogan in Maryland, Charlie Baker in Massachusetts,” says Tim. “I mean there’s some Republican governors who’ve done great work in this.”

Throughout the first eight months of the pandemic, I interviewed scores of local business owners and community activists.

A quality shared by all successful local business owners is resilience, and an ability to think quickly on your feet, knowing when to bob and weave, and when to rope a dope. Richmond’s local business community ruled the ring. As soon as COVID-19 struck, these entrepreneurs rewrote their game books. They adopted protocols issued by the CDC and Governor Northam’s office; they reinvented the way they do business. And the community’s response to them was overwhelming.

Shortly after they shuttered, area res-

taurants opened with contactless, curbside pickup. Some of these venues—Zorba’s Pizza Express and Early Bird Biscuit—were already geared for this kind of service. But others like Dot’s Back Inn, Stir Crazy and the Mill on MacArthur simply changed their methods for ordering, payment and picking up.

“COVID struck and on March 15 we decided to close the doors for inside dining,” said Tracey Thoroman, co-owner of HOBNOB. “And on March 17 we opened a sort of drive-through format, and that worked pretty well. It was a little slow at the beginning, but over the first month it started to pick up greatly. People have been really supportive. They’ve been supportive to our staff, adding gratuities that maybe weren’t as common with to-go food. I think people saw the benefit of helping us get our staff through this. It was pretty amazing. People have been very supportive. That’s the thing about independent business owners, you have to figure it out. You can’t just roll over. I feel like Richmond’s got to be one of the top cities in the country as far as supporting local businesses.”

EIGHT MINUTES AND

forty-six seconds on May 25 would illustrate in the most graphic way conceivable how systemic racism is literally murdering Black people. It was sickening to watch, and all Americans should be required to witness every single second of it. An excruciatingly long and violent video filmed in its entirety by Darnella Frazier, a brave 17-year old high school senior, showed the sadistic murder of a Black man by a white man who was supposed to protect and serve him. More than a billion people across the Earth watched in horror as this man was murdered by a cop, while three other police officers stood by and did nothing to stop the brutality. Everything was changed for good and all; there was no going back. George Floyd’s murder shone a retina-scorching light on racial inequities that have dominated our nation since even before its birth. “It had all the hallmarks of a modern day lynching, and it was horrific,” State Senator Jennifer McClellan told me. “Having done quite a bit of work on uncovering and elevating the stories of lynching in Virginia, that was my first reaction. Add that to the list.”

It’s quite a long list, too. From 1882 through 1968 alone, about 3,500 black men were lynched in this country, the overwhelming majority of those murders, about 80 percent of them, com-



Senator Jennifer McClellan.



Delegate Jeff Bourne.

mitted in southern states. It all rose out of the Jim Crow era, when white southerners decided Blacks should remain dehumanized, and essentially enslaved. These white men resented their terrific defeat at the hands of the Union, and scorned a peaceable Reconstruction. Instead of accepting the equality of all human beings, they reaffirmed their commitment to the lunatic notion of white supremacy. But since the cruel murder of George Floyd there has been a palpable awakening of the American psyche.

“I went out to a couple of different protests on Sunday, and then I went to the march on Monday from the Capitol to the Lee monument,” said Senator McClellan. “There was a genuine shift in the air. This is not just, ‘We’re going to rise up and then go back to life as normal.’ It really feels like we’re going to rise up and commit to change.”

Throughout the country, and around the world, millions are demanding justice. Among the protesters’ rally-

ing cries is “Black Lives Matter”, which is now the new name of a section of the street the White House faces. The protests have spread from cities to suburbs and even out to the rural reaches of America.

Back in 2017, I interviewed Delegate Jeff Bourne for a profile piece featured on the cover of NORTH of the JAMES. During the course of that interview, he told me a story that has agitated me ever since. Jeff, at the time, sported no beard. Most days that I saw him at Stir Crazy Café, he was clean-shaven, and dressed impeccably in a Navy blue blazer, crisp white shirt, rep tie, charcoal gray slacks. Tacked to the left lapel of his jacket was a brass and enamel pin depicting the great seal of the Commonwealth of Virginia. And he drove a late model BMW sports car. Jeff told me that on Saturdays he would sometimes travel up to the Lowe’s on Parham to purchase supplies for a home improvement project. Instead of his weekday dress, he might



Lee Monument.

BEFORE THE BENCH



Todd DuVal, Esq.
McDonald, Sutton & Duval

Each month, Todd DuVal, who has been practicing law for almost 30 years, will answer legal questions you may have so you can make the best decision about your representation in court.

“Do I need a lawyer?”

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be wearing sweats, and his face might be cast with a shadow of stubble. He told me that once he crossed the line from Richmond into the county to our north, he might be pulled over by the local police. For no reason, other than being a black man dressed down and driving an expensive car. And it had happened on more than one occasion. When I asked him if he had had “the talk” with his son, who was just four at the time, Jeff shook head. “No,” he said. “But I’m going to have to soon.”

During a more recent interview with Jeff, I mentioned the incidents of him being pulled over for no reason other than what appeared to be racial profiling. “My experiences were mild compared to the examples we’ve seen over the last decade or so,” Delegate Bourne said. I then asked if he has had “the talk” with his son.

“What I struggle with is finding the line between being brutally honest, but also communicating that reality to an eight-year-old,” said Delegate Bourne. “I mean we can have a much more mature conversation now. (Keep in mind, the child is just eight.) I’ve always had the conversation with my daughter, who’s much more mature. She’s going to be twelve in a couple of weeks. So having to explain to them about how things just aren’t the same for everyone is a very difficult proposition. Especially when you’re trying to raise a young black boy who has become, throughout our history, seen as a threat or a threatening figure.”

During the protests about the use of excessive force by police, and the murder of Blacks by police, Delegate Bourne had been particularly taken by certain signs held aloft by black children. “I’ve seen a bunch of pictures with a black kid holding up a sign that says, ‘When did I become a threat and not a baby?’ And it’s true, you see it all over, and that’s why I’m so encouraged by this moment in our history.”

It is unlike any other time Delegate Bourne has ever seen. “I think we are in a real watershed moment in our history,” he said. “We have squandered opportunities throughout our lives, but I think this one feels different to me. I think it’s harnessed an energy and a commitment to making the changes that need to be made in a lot of people.”

And it crossed lines of gender, religious belief and skin color. “I’ve had a lot of my friends who don’t necessarily share the same skin color as me say, ‘You know, the last week has changed my perspective on a lot of different things and opened my eyes

to so many things I just wasn’t aware of,’” said Delegate Bourne. “So, I think if we can get there and continue down that path, we can make the changes that need to be made.”

Real change comes only with sweeping policy changes.

“I am working as hard as I ever have in trying to develop a legislative package, along with some of my colleagues, about how we specifically deal from a policy perspective with the use of force and the police killings,” Delegate Bourne said. “And really try to bring more equity and fair policing practices and all of that because you know we’ve got to do something. And so we’re going to do as much as we can. We are going to put them in place.”

Virginia’s ever-growing Black Caucus is unbending in its commitment to equity and justice.

“The Black Caucus has been firm in this proposition,” Delegate Bourne explained. “We don’t have permanent friends or enemies. We have permanent interests, and our interests lie in making sure that communities of color are treated equally and equitably under all the laws so that everyone truly can take advantage of opportunities that they have before them.”

What the world has seen since the barbaric murder of George Floyd is much more than a series of protests.

“It is an uprising,” Delegate Jeff Bourne said.

BY EARLY SUMMER, that uprising led to a sort of domino effect which would topple monuments to men who fought to preserve slavery. Since last May, 111 Confederate symbols and monuments were taken down and removed across the country, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center. Back in March, the Virginia General Assembly adopted bills that permit localities to remove Confederate memorials at their discretion. By April, Governor Ralph Northam had signed the bills into law.

The adoption of these bills came more than three years after the Charlottesville City Council voted to remove statues of Robert E. Lee and Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson from municipal parks, which was in response to the bloody massacre of nine African American congregants in the basement of a church in South Carolina. That vote by council in Charlottesville spurred one of the most hideous moments in Virginia’s



Stonewall Jackson just before his removal.

21st century history.

On a hot August night three years ago, alt-right, neo-Confederates, neo-Nazis, Klansmen, and right-wing militias descended on Charlottesville like a plague. At night, they carried torches, bleating racist and anti-Semitic slogans, while wielding semiautomatic weapons, and waving the Confederate battle flag alongside the flag of the Third Reich and the co-opted Gadsden flag of the Tea Party.

The following day would see even more mayhem and the vilest kind of vitriol, along with carnage. A white supremacist named James Alex Fields, Jr. revved the engine of his car, dropped it into gear, and drove head on into a crowd of counter-protesters. He murdered Heather Heyer, and injured 19 other people. This neo-Confederate pleaded guilty to 29 federal hate crimes and was sentenced to life imprisonment, with 419 additional years for good measure.

It’s odd how history sometimes comes full circle. Days after the decisive Union victory at Gettysburg, a baby by the name of John Mitchell, Jr. was born into slavery in Richmond’s Jackson Ward. He was a brilliant young man, a prolific writer, and a courageous activist. At the age of twenty-one he became editor of *The Richmond Planet*, an African American newspaper. He would later serve two terms as an alderman, representing Jackson Ward. Along with several other councilmen of the time, he vehemently opposed the erection of monuments to Confederate leaders. Here is what he wrote well over a century ago regarding the Civil War monuments in Richmond: “This glorification of States Rights Doctrine — the right of secession and the honoring of men who represented that cause will ultimately result in the handing down to generations unborn

a legacy of treason and blood.”

Symbols of white supremacy and racism can inspire horrific acts of domestic terrorism. Consider the battle flag of the Confederacy, the stars and bars.

“This symbol of racial terror and racism was real enough to motivate someone to massacre nine people,” Rose Simmons told me during a telephone interview. “It carried enough power for him to embrace it and to murder nine innocent people.”

Among that group of innocent people known as the Emanuel Nine was Rose’s beloved father, Daniel L. Simmons. Daniel was slain with eight other people who were attending a Bible study class in the basement of Emanuel Baptist Church in Charleston, South Carolina. A twenty-one year old white supremacist and neo-Confederate aimed a Glock 41 and fired hollow-point bullets into men and women, old and young, all the while shouting racial epithets.

“As I look back on it,” Rose said. “Actually next week will be the fifth year commemoration, as we say, of that horrible shooting. It’s been a journey is what it’s been.”

Her father, a disabled Army veteran and retired minister, earned a master’s degree in social work and later a doctor of divinity. He worked for years as a vocational rehabilitation specialist for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

“Here’s my father,” said Rose. “He went after the American dream. Not only did he seek or pursue it, he accomplished it, he achieved it. And fifty years after the end of the Civil Rights movement, he was gunned down in his retirement in the basement of a church, by a twenty-one year old, self-proclaimed, Confederate flag-waving, white supremacist.”

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Rose's grandparents were sharecroppers, the institution of slavery in a more modern era, and as a high school student in Columbia, she could not understand why the Confederate flag flew from a mast on the summit of the state capitol. This was in the late 1970s. "There were protests to get the flag removed, but it never came to pass, they could never do it," she said. "It took nine dead bodies in the basement of a church to spark the interest for that flag to be removed."

Since that time, several Confederate statues have been taken down from public display and placed in museums. "That's where they belong," said Rose.

Rose told me she is encouraged to see the international protests against the cruel murder of George Floyd, and so many other Blacks slain by police. "I'm for it a hundred percent," said Rose. "I don't agree with the violence and the looting because that's a low level mindset, and that's not what the real protesters are out there for."

Rose Simmons loves American history, particularly the Civil War era, but she wants the statues off Monument Avenue. "Not only am I glad to hear that they're going to be removed," she said. "I want to be there when the statues come down."

A couple years back, shortly after gun-toting, torch-bearing, flag-waving, Nazis, white supremacists and neo-Confederates descended on Charlottesville like a plague, murdering one woman and injuring many others, my brother Chris and I were texting one another about the fate of Confederate monuments in Richmond. At that time, Chris and his wife lived in a tiny Maryland village called Keedysville, less than five miles away from Antietam National Battlefield in Sharpsburg. Chris and his wife, Margaret, had raised their two children there in an 18th century log and stone house they had meticulously restored over the course of some twenty years. Chris, who is among other things, a sculptor, an architect, and a blacksmith, spent most of his career with the National Park Service. His specialty was historic preservation.

"What will they call Monument Avenue when the monuments come down?" he typed.

"A Road Less Traveller," I responded.

"Well-played," Chris replied, which meant a lot to me; Chris possesses a rapier wit.

When the monuments began to come down this past summer, they were like

bowling pins, falling in slow motion. A massive ball of outrage, molded from centuries of racism and inequity, struck the pocket perfectly—no spare; just a resounding, if protracted, strike. One by one they fell, torn from their pedestals by protesters, or removed by professionals with the aid of portable circular saws that cut through bronze bolts that had secured them to their lofty heights for more than a century. The monuments have since been warehoused until their final fate is decided.

On July 1, the very day a state law went into effect giving municipalities the power to remove Confederate monuments, Mayor Levar Stoney began tackling the statues along Monument Avenue with all deliberate speed.

Jefferson Davis had already been toppled by protesters back in mid-June. The statue lay face up on the asphalt, its torso coated with pink paint that called to mind a negligee, perhaps a reference to the legend that Davis, a month after the Surrender at Appomattox, had dressed in women's garments to avoid capture by Union troops, who ultimately arrested him just outside Irwinville, Georgia. The former president of the former Confederacy was unceremoniously loaded on to the flat bed of a tow truck and hauled away into the night. A group of protesters cheered and chanted.

Two weeks later, I stood among more than a thousand people, the vast majority wearing masks, who formed a large circle thirty feet from the central island of the rotary at the juncture of Arthur Ashe Boulevard and Monument Avenue. Rising from that island, atop a stone pedestal, was a massive equestrian statue of Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, who, in the eyes of many Confederate devotees, is just one rung below General Robert E. Lee in that strange pantheon at which they seem to worship.

Work crews rose on the fenced platform of an articulating boom lift, a sort of cherry picker that can move in any direction. Once at the hooves of Little Sorrel, Jackson's horse, the team of hardhat-clad men began carefully securing harnesses sheathed in anti-chafing gear at key points around the forelegs and hind legs of the bronze horse.

Throughout the afternoon, the crowd swelled, and each time a harness was secured, there rose a chorus of chants. "No justice, no peace." "Black lives matter." "F*** that statue." And so on.



Daughter of one of the Charleston Nine, Rose Simmons

A massive crane, towering about the monument, would groan and screech when the tension on the harnesses tautened, and it seemed at any moment the machineries would lift the statue from its perch. But time dragged on.

By late afternoon, clouds had begun moving in, white at first and then gray, and to the South a steep bank of clouds turned dark as ancient pewter. You could see bolts of lightning in the darkest of those clouds, and I overheard the man operating the crane yell up to his compatriots at the top of the monument to hurry up. "You can see it coming," he screamed, and the two men near the legs of Little Sorrel, looked to the South, and then got back to their work of cutting through the bronze bolts. Just then, the skies opened. Globes of water, each a puddle unto itself, fell hard, and were quickly followed by sheets of rain. Once that final bolt was severed, and after the two men descended, the crane peeled the statue away from its stone base. As the statue rose, there was a long peal of thunder that rolled along like the report of distant artillery, ending in a final clap loud as the voice of God. At that same instant, a man and a woman crossed over to the large bell of a nearby church and began ringing it.

The graffiti on the stone base, the crowds, and their chants and their applause and their cheers, and the tolling of the bell, reminded me of footage I had seen on TV thirty years ago when the Berlin Wall came down. The throng on Monument Avenue was jubilant and thoroughly soaked by a pummeling rain, a showering

baptism. And they were people of all colors, ages and genders.

"Who's street?" they asked in unison.

"Our street," they answered as one voice.

The following day, without much fanfare, the statue of Matthew Fontaine Maury came down (the globe would be removed a little over a week later). On July 7, J.E.B. Stuart, the last of the city-owned Confederate statues on Monument Avenue was removed.

All that now remains is the largest monument, which resides on state land. A court injunction has temporarily barred its removal.

Lee stands alone now, the only member of the pantheon still towering above Monument Avenue. He is crippled in his power much as he was during the Civil War: his right arm (Stonewall Jackson) is gone, and his eyes and ears (J.E.B. Stuart) have been plucked away and punctured. The white marble pedestal on which the gelded Traveler stands has been converted into a rainbow canvas, and the median strips adjacent it have been turned into a sort of camp for protesters, an army of them, who seem intent on holding their ground until this three-dimensional memorial to white supremacy is removed, until they achieve victory. The circle itself has been rechristened Marcus-David Peters Circle in honor of a 24-year-old Black man shot and killed by Richmond police two years ago.

Those who wanted the monuments to stay put often cried a chorus of "history and heritage".

Every one of the Confederate figures represented by the statues that once stood on Monument Avenue defended human bondage, and the rape, torture and murder of enslaved Africans, and their descendants. Just read the articles of secession from each of the rebel states that would form the Confederacy. Slavery, and its preservation, is mentioned over and over again, as is the notion of white supremacy and the inherent inferiority of people of African descent.

Consider this excerpt from what is often called the "cornerstone speech" delivered on the eve of the Civil War by Alexander Stephens, vice president of the Confederacy. "Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea," he said. "Its foundations are laid, its corner-stone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal

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condition. This, our new government, is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth.”

Here's another fact: Each one of those Confederate leaders once memorialized on Monument Avenue attended the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, and broke his solemn oath to “support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic . . .”

In terms of their history, Confederate monuments like those erected in Richmond served two other purposes, one being a revisionist, and often romanticized, history of the Confederacy and the myth of the “Lost Cause.” The other reason for their placement in Richmond and elsewhere in the country is even more disturbing. They were symbols of white supremacy to let Blacks know that despite the Emancipation Proclamation, the Union victory, the adoption of the Civil War Amendments, and a hundred years later, the Civil Rights Movement, they, as a people, would never be equal to whites.

The vast majority of the Confederate monuments erected in public places began in the mid-1890s just as Southern states began enacting the egregious Jim Crow laws which were created to disenfranchise Blacks and to re-segregate society after three decades of integration. These laws and this rapid construction of Confederate monuments lasted well into the 1920s, a period that saw the lynching of Black men in unprecedented numbers, and a massive revival of the domestic terrorist group known as the Ku Klux Klan. Many of these monuments were sponsored by the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

It's worth noting here, too, that the white supremacist who massacred the Charleston Nine had visited Confederate monuments throughout South Carolina shortly before he went on his rampage. As Rose Simmons had said, these symbols do incite the most hideous kind of racial violence.

Returning to Monument Avenue and its inception: Real estate developers selling lots there claimed in advertisements at the time that “no lots can ever be sold or rented in MONUMENT AVENUE PARK to any person of African descent.” That's historic fact.

Only real history can save us from ourselves.

Not a sanitized version of it either—one that glorifies just those moments in our past when we did act in exemplary ways. It must be a history that exposes all of our failures and shortcomings, an acknowledgement and an acceptance of our imperfections, those critical moments when we succumbed to our baser instincts, and forsook our loftier ideals.

All great fiction must confront painful pasts. Literary works that do otherwise fall short, and end up in bargain bins or kindling boxes because they are two-dimensional tales at best, lacking any real depth.

Even when examining the novels of our own lives, the histories of our past deeds, we can never inch forward to a greater truth unless we are able to admit our own mistakes, and confront them, and learn through their correction. There is something gratifying in coming clean with it all, even those things that in the past might have plagued us. Without lies to obfuscate, all things become clear.

JANUARY 6 IS THE

Feast of the Epiphany, which celebrates the moment God, incarnate in human flesh, was shown to humanity. That's when the Magi, bearing gifts, beheld the Christ child for the first time. According to the Christian faith, it was a moment of revelation. January 6, 2021 was also a day of revelation, but instead of exposing the Light of the World, it revealed a hideous darkness. Violent insurrectionists, incited by the former president, attempted a coup in Democracy's Sanctum Sanctorum. Like the murder of George Floyd, it was all captured in real time on a thousand cameras and cellphones, and it will never be erased from our memory. Nor should it.

For just like all the events of this past year, it gave us 2020 vision.

Now we can look forward with neither mote of dust nor beam of lumber obscuring our view. But the arc of our moral universe is made of an obstinate metal, and it will need much more hammering until it is finally bent toward justice. Until such time, we must all beg for breath in the way George Floyd and COVID-19 taught us. **NS**



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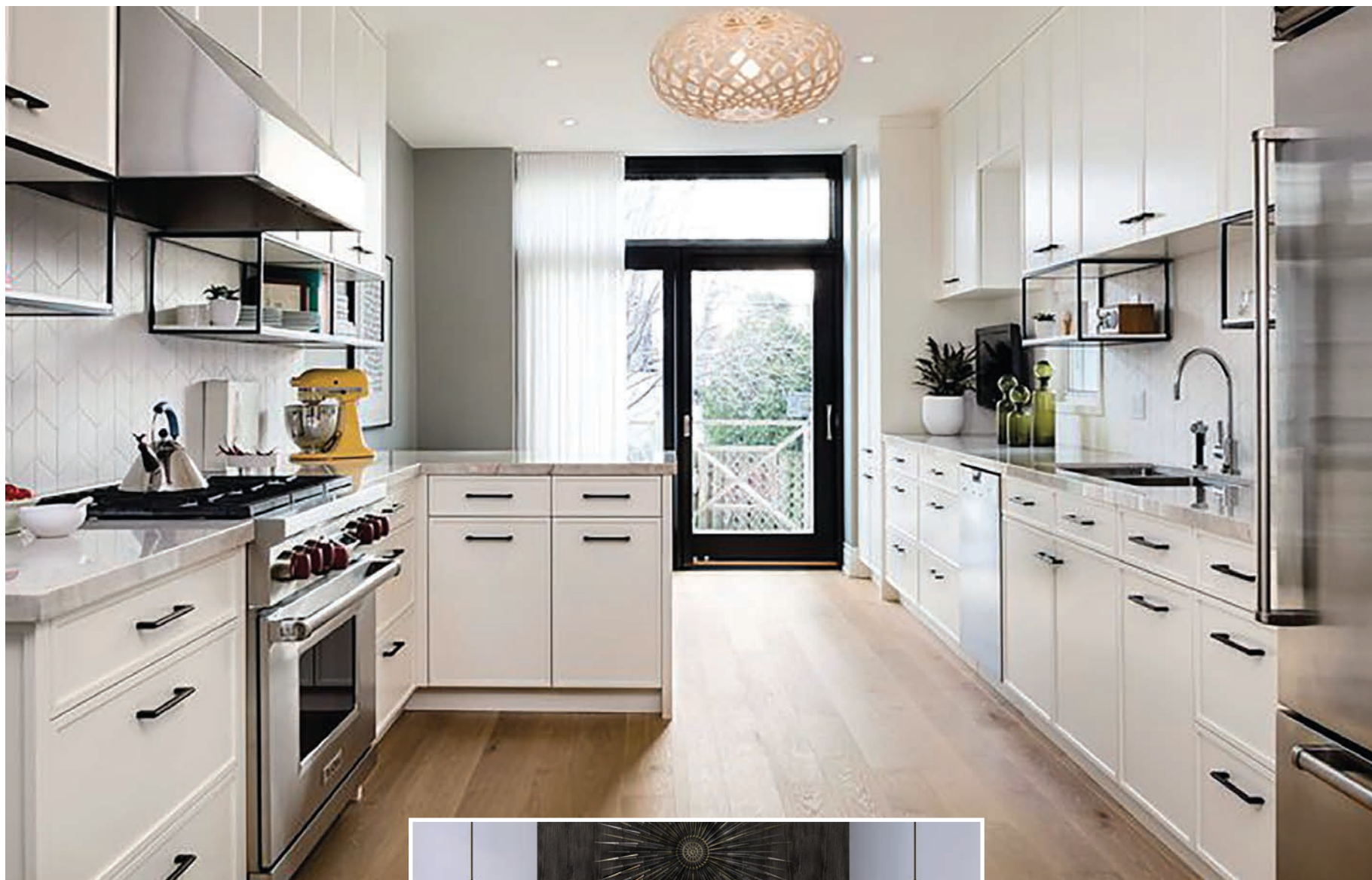
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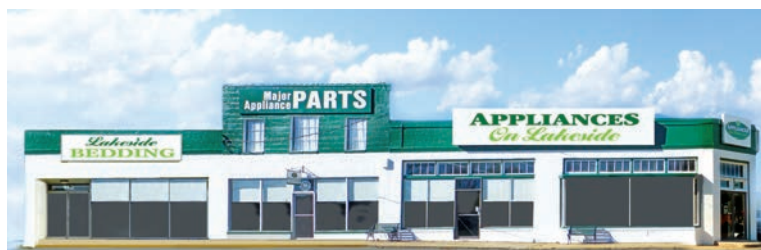


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