

VIRGINIA:

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT FOR THE CITY OF RICHMOND

ANONYMOUS,

Plaintiff

v.

MAYOR LEVAR MARCUS STONEY,

Defendant.

CIVIL NO.: _____
TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE

COMPLAINT FOR EMERGENCY INJUNCTIVE AND DECLARATORY RELIEF

COMES NOW your Plaintiff filing pseudonymously as "ANONYMOUS", by counsel, and moves this Court for emergency injunctive relief to enjoin, restrain and inhibit the Defendant, MAYOR LEVAR MARCUS STONEY, from ordering or authorizing the removals of any further public monuments or memorials from the Capitol of Virginia, the City of Richmond, in violation of §15.2-1812(B) of the Code of Virginia (1950), as amended. In support thereof, Plaintiff states as follows:

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

1. This court has subject-matter jurisdiction over this matter pursuant to §17.1-513 and §8.01-261 of the Code of Virginia (1950), as amended.
2. The subject property at controversy herein, and the exigent circumstances related thereto, exist within the City of Richmond, Virginia.

PARTIES

3. Plaintiff is a Virginia and United States citizen; and an "interested person" concerning the removal of public monuments and memorials in the Capitol of Virginia pursuant to Virginia Code §15.2-1812(B).

4. Defendant is the Mayor of the City of Richmond, Virginia, ordinarily conducts business within Richmond, Virginia, and resides in Richmond, Virginia.
5. The subject property involves unspecified public monuments and memorials erected within the city of Richmond, Virginia as described in Virginia Code §15.2-1812(A).

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

6. On April 10, 2020, Governor Ralph Northam (Governor Northam) signed into law legislation passed by the Virginia Assembly which allows for local municipalities to remove war memorials after a sixty-day administrative process that includes a 30-day notice to the public, a public hearing, and a 30-day stay following the hearing to determine the memorial's final disposition.
7. The new legislation added §15.2-1812(B) to the Code of Virginia, which was enacted into law on July 1, 2020.
8. The Office of the Press Secretary to the Mayor of Richmond published a informal Mayoral Press Release on July 1, 2020 stating that, "Mayor Levar Stoney, using his emergency powers, ordered the immediate removal of multiple monuments in the city, including Confederate statues..." (incorporated herein as Exhibit A)
9. The press release asserted that the Defendant made the decision to use his "emergency powers" to remove the statues because, in part, they present a "severe, immediate and growing threat to public safety."
10. By 3:00 p.m. on July 1, 2020, with less than twenty-four hours notice to the public, crane operators were removing the hundred year old memorial erected to the Confederate General, Stonewall Jackson, as ordered by the Defendant¹.

¹ <https://twitter.com/i/status/1278408735832662016>

11. On July 2, 2020, with no published notice to the public, the ninety-two year old memorial dedicated to U.S. Naval Officer, Matthew Fontaine Maury was also removed as ordered by the Defendant².
12. As of the time of this filing on July 7, 2020, with no published notice to the public, the century-old memorial dedicated to Confederate general J.E.B. Stuart is being removed as ordered by the Defendant³.

EXIGENT CIRCUMSTANCES

13. On March 13, 2020, Governor Northam entered Executive Order 53⁴, closing all K-12 public schools across the state for two weeks as a precautionary measure due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
14. Ten days later, Governor Northam extended Executive Order 53 and closed all K-12 public schools across the state for the rest of the academic year.
15. For the time being, Plaintiff is responsible for providing general educational home school materials, activities and lesson plans for x children.
16. As part of an upcoming U.S and Virginia history lesson activity, Plaintiff planned to take x children on a field trip to the Capitol of Virginia to tour the statues along Monument Avenue as well as other relevant historical sites in and around the City of Richmond
17. Plaintiff's intention to tour the public monuments in the Capitol of Virginia as a home school history lesson activity makes Plaintiff an "interested person" in their intended removals pursuant to Virginia Code §15.2-1812(B).

² <https://www.nbc12.com/2020/07/02/city-start-removal-maury-statue-monument-avenue/>

³ <https://wset.com/news/local/crews-remove-monument-of-confederate-gen-jeb-stuart-in-richmond>

⁴ [https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/executive-actions/EO-53-Temporary-Restrictions-Due-To-Novel-Coronavirus-\(COVID-19\).pdf](https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/executive-actions/EO-53-Temporary-Restrictions-Due-To-Novel-Coronavirus-(COVID-19).pdf)

18. Governor Northam's Executive Order 55³ ordering Virginia residents to stay in their homes, combined with the recent heightened level of criminal activity existing within the City of Richmond, has hampered and delayed the Plaintiff's ability to effectuate those lesson plans safely with x children to date.
19. The Defendant addressed the removal of the monuments during a media briefing at River City Middle School on July 2, 2020, at which time he indicated that there would be eleven more statues removed around the city over the next few days⁶.
20. The Defendant's unlawful actions to expeditiously remove public monuments causes a concrete and particularized injury to the Plaintiff's rights as a Virginia citizen.

COUNT ONE

(Virginia Code §15.2-1812(B) – Memorials for War Veterans)

21. Plaintiff restates and realleges the facts and allegations contained in paragraphs 1-21 above.
22. The Defendant made a clear and deliberate move to circumvent the newly enacted statute concerning the removals of monuments and memorials pursuant to Virginia Code §15.2-1812(B) by issuing an unlawful emergency ordinance (as particularly described in COUNT TWO) through which he ordered the removal of a public monument on the very same day the new statute was enacted into law; the same statute affording the Richmond City Council the sole authority to determine the final disposition of any monument or memorial in question in accordance with statute.
23. The Defendant's actions, in his capacity as the Mayor of Richmond, to order the expedient removal of three public monuments from Monument Avenue in violation

³ [https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorviriniagov/executive-actions/EO-55-Temporary-Stay-at-Home-Order-Due-to-Novel-Coronavirus-\(COVID-19\).pdf](https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorviriniagov/executive-actions/EO-55-Temporary-Stay-at-Home-Order-Due-to-Novel-Coronavirus-(COVID-19).pdf)

⁶ <https://wset.com/news/local/second-confederate-monument-removed-in-richmond-11-to-be-taken-down-in-coming-days>

of public notice requirements, denied the Plaintiff's rights to "present [x] views" as an "interested person" prior to their removals pursuant to Virginia Code §15.2-1812(B).

24. Plaintiff is an "interested person" as it relates to the intended removal of public monuments and memorials in the Capitol of the Commonwealth.

25. In his informal Mayoral Press Release issued on July 1, 2020, the Defendant acknowledged the newly enacted statute and stated, "In March of 2020, the General Assembly passed an amendment empowering localities like Richmond to remove monuments to the Lost Cause. The law took effect today, July 1, at 12 AM, allowing Richmond to enter into a 60-day administrative process during which the city will solicit public input while determining the fate of the statues. Any removed statues will be placed in temporary storage while that process takes place."

(emphasis added) (See Exhibit A)

26. The Defendant deliberately interjected the phrase "the lost cause" into his own interpretation of the text of the new statute.

27. The Defendant cited no legal authority for indefinitely placing removed monuments in "temporary storage."

28. In fact, Virginia Code §15.2-1812(A) provides authority for municipalities to erect monuments or memorials dedicated to the veterans of "any war or conflict", and specifically identifies and names fifteen different historical U.S. wars and conflicts, of which The Civil War (1861-1865) is included. Virginia Code §15.2-1812(B), as referenced by the Defendant in his Mayoral Press Release on July 1, 2020, merely adds language allowing for the removal of any of the monuments and memorials described above, after a sixty-day administrative process further described therein.

29. The Defendant has shown ample opportunities to publicly express his own personal views about the removals of public monuments, but has failed to allow any other interested persons that same right and privilege under the law.
30. The Defendant did not and still has not published public notice regarding the exact monuments selected for removal, has not specified the exact nature of the public emergency warranting the monument removals, nor has he published public notice of the dates and locations of monument removals in and around the City of Richmond.
31. The exigent circumstances of the Defendant's declared intent to continue with the removal of eleven more unspecified monuments from the City of Richmond within the next few days without legal justification or recourse, denies the Plaintiff's rights, and leaves all interested persons without a voice or recourse.

COUNT TWO

(Richmond City Code §4-11 – Emergency Ordinances)

32. Plaintiff restates and realleges the facts and allegations contained in paragraphs 1-32 above.
33. The Defendant demonstrated a willful and deliberate usurp of legal authority when he unilaterally issued an emergency ordinance to remove public monuments along Memorial Avenue without the approval of the Richmond City Council on July 1, 2020.
34. The Defendant's orders to remove public monuments along Monument Avenue were done so in perpetuation of the Defendant's personal vision and not as a matter of public safety or law.
35. The Defendant has an established and well-published personal vision for Monument Avenue that was manifested in an emergency ordinance on July 1, 2020.

36. On June 22, 2017, the Defendant issued a Mayoral Press Release in which he challenged the historical relevance of The Confederacy and described it as "The Lost Cause". The Defendant directed the Monument Avenue Commission (The Commission) to pursue a collaborative and dedicated effort to gain public insight as to how best provide context for the confederate statues along Memorial Avenue and to expand upon it to make it more inclusive and diverse (incorporated herein as Exhibit B.)
37. By August 16, 2017, the Defendant announced his updated vision for the The Commission in a Tweet which read, "Effective immediately, Monument Avenue Commission will include examination of removal and/or relocation of some or all confederate statues" (incorporated hereto as Exhibit C.)
38. In the Mayoral Press Release issued on that same day, the Defendant expressed a renewed distain for the Confederate memorials along Monument Avenue by saying, "I wish they had never been built" and "I personally believe they are offensive and need to be removed" (incorporated hereto as Exhibit D.)
39. The Defendant's desire to completely remove the statues was met with imposing legal obstacles. In 2017, Virginia Code §15.2-1812 only provided authority for local municipalities to erect war monuments and memorials, but did not provide a clear remedy for lawful removal thereof.
40. On July 1, 2020, the above statute was amended to include lawful removal remedies, including a thirty-day notice, a public hearing, and a thirty-day period for the Richmond City Council to deliberate and decide upon on a final disposition.

41. The new statute afforded sole authority to the Richmond City Council to decide upon the final disposition of any public monument or removal, in accordance with the provisions of Virginia Code §15.2-1812(B).
42. On the same day the new statute was enacted into law the Defendant, while acting under the authority of arbitrary "emergency powers", declared the existence of "multiple" unspecified monuments in the City of Richmond as posing a "severe, immediate and growing threat to public safety", and then immediately ordered and orchestrated the removal of several statues to the surprise of many Virginians including the Plaintiff.
43. The Defendant's actions were conducted in violation of Virginia Code §4-11, which requires the Defendant to state with specificity the emergency being claimed, and to gain the approval the ordinance by the Richmond City Council as confirmed by at least two-thirds affirmative votes.
44. The Defendant was not able to secure the required number of votes and the meeting was postponed to allow for public notice.
45. Despite the lack of approval of the Richmond City Council, the Defendant proceeded to effectuate his emergency ordinance and orchestrated the removals of two public monuments along Memorial Avenue in the days to follow against the legal advice of Interim City Attorney Haskell Brown.
46. The Defendant reiterated his vision for Monument Avenue as his motivation to remove the monuments when he stated in an interview with National Public Radio, "It's time to move beyond the lost cause and embrace the righteous cause. We can

⁷ <https://www.npr.org/sections/live-updates-protests-for-racial-justice/2020/07/01/886204604/richmond-v-a-mayor-orders-emergency-removal-of-confederate-statues>

be more than just the capital of the Confederacy. It's time for us to be the capital of compassion." (emphasis added)

47. The Defendant's conduct has only served to perpetuate the Defendant's personal views and desires, which is not sufficient to support an emergency ordinance which supersedes Virginia law.
48. The Defendant has failed to provide any information or data supporting his claimed nexus between any particular public monument or memorial and the idea that its continued presence poses a "severe, immediate and growing threat to public safety", and has failed to offer the public any less restrictive alternatives than the complete removal of public monuments at his own discretion.
49. The Defendant's actions were and remain unilateral, unbalanced, and unchecked, and are being done so under the guise of undefined "emergency powers" that affect the rights of the Plaintiff and all interested persons.
50. The Defendant swore an oath to "faithfully and impartially" discharge his duties as the Mayor of Richmond on December 31, 2016.
51. The Defendant has a duty as the Mayor of Richmond to be responsible for the proper administration of city government pursuant to §§5.01 and 5.05.5 of the Richmond City Code.
52. The "faithful and impartial" and "proper administration" of city government is not achieved by circumventing and disregarding governing statutes of the Commonwealth through the unjustified and unwarranted use of unapproved emergency ordinances to perpetuate the personal vision and desires of the Mayor.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff prays this Court enter an emergency *ex parte* injunction to accomplish the following:

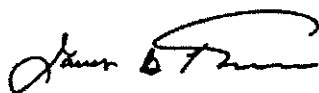
- 1) To enjoin, restrain and otherwise prohibit the Defendant from ordering, authorizing or otherwise allowing for the removal of any further public monuments or memorials within the City of Richmond in any manner which violates Virginia Code §15.2-1812(B);
- 2) To declare the Defendant's conduct while acting under "emergency powers" to remove public monuments as unlawful in violation of Virginia Code §§4-11 and 15.2-1812(B).
- 3) To invalidate the Defendant's emergency ordinance of July 1, 2020 as being void *ab initio* and unenforceable;
- 4) To order the Defendant to publish a list of the specific public monuments and memorials that have been selected by him as candidates for intended removal, and his intended timeline to remove them;
- 5) To order the disclosure of the temporary storage facilities in which the removed statues have been placed, the manner in which they are being stored and protected, and to immediately arrange for a public hearing to discuss the final disposition thereof.
- 6) That Plaintiff be afforded such other relief as the nature of x cause may require.

TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE

Respectfully Submitted,

**ANONYMOUS,
By Counsel**

By: _____



James B. Thomas, Esquire (VSB #38630)
Counsel for the Plaintiff
P.O. Box 1249
Bedford, VA 24523
(757) 218-3087

Exhibit A

0103501.com

0103501.com

Mayor Stoney orders immediate removal of Confederate monuments

Mayor Stoney orders immediate removal of Confederate monuments

Mayor Stoney orders immediate removal of Confederate monuments

Mayor Stoney orders immediate removal of Confederate monuments

Mayor Stoney orders immediate removal of Confederate monuments

Mayor Stoney orders immediate removal of Confederate monuments

Mayor Stoney orders immediate removal of Confederate monuments

Mayor Stoney orders immediate removal of Confederate monuments

Mayor Stoney orders immediate removal of Confederate monuments

archive

Exhibit B

XI. Appendix- A

Mayoral Press Releases Establishing and Amending Monument Avenue Commission

REMARKS BY MAYOR LEVAR M. STONEY - JUNE 22, 2017

Good afternoon. Thank you all for coming.

Monument Avenue is one of Richmond's most beautiful streets. Along with Jackson Ward, it is one of only two National Historic Landmark Districts in the City.

Every year, thousands of tourists flock to it, thousands of Richmonders run down it, and still more travel its leafy, cobblestoned lanes on the way to work and home every day.

It's been described as one of the most picturesque grand boulevards and urban residential neighborhoods in the world.

But my fellow Richmonders, something is wrong with this picture. It's the story told by the Confederate monuments that give the street its famous name and have defined its landscape for more than a century.

That story is, at best, an incomplete story – equal parts myth and deception. It was written in stone and bronze more than 100 years ago – not only to distort history by lionizing the architects and defenders of slavery, but also to perpetuate the tyranny and terror of Jim Crow and usher in a new era of white supremacy.

These inanimate objects were designed to do what the Confederate generals and the racist ideologues they depict could not – keep the free African people of Virginia in bondage.

The Lost Cause was their story – and they stuck to it.

But it was not history.

Monument Avenue was a real estate development that began with the Lee Statue in 1890, and it succeeded -- as a development venture AND in fabricating the "Lost Cause" ideology as truth.

In fact, it was nostalgia masquerading as history. But over decades this nostalgia became embedded and subsequently a part of our history, part of the false narrative – the alternative facts, if you will -- that we will begin to fact check, starting today.

I got into politics and government to give a voice to the voiceless and right wrongs. When I was running for office, I said that these Confederate statues require context – that is, an explanation of what they actually are – who built them, why they were built and how they came to preside over the culture of this city.

Ladies and gentlemen this is our time, and it's our responsibility, to set the historical record straight.

These will be difficult discussions, but we need to have them.

It is my belief that without telling the WHOLE story, these monuments constitute a default endorsement of a shameful period in our nation and in our city – one that does a disservice to the principles of racial equality, tolerance and unity we celebrate as values in One Richmond today.

And that is why I am pleased to announce the creation of the Monument Avenue Commission.

The job of this commission will be to solicit public input and make recommendations to the Mayor's Office on how to best tell the real story of these Monuments.

We have assembled a distinguished and experienced team of experts – a number of them who are here with us today. Historians, artists, authors and community leaders who will guide this process.

I am honored to announce that Christy Coleman, CEO of the American Civil War Museum, and Greg Kimball, Director of Education and Outreach for the Library of Virginia, have agreed to serve as Commission co-chairs.

The City is also fortunate to have as commission members: Councilman Andreas Addison, Ed Ayers, Stacy Burrs, Sarah Driggs, Councilwoman Kim Gray, Julian Hayter, Laurant Lee, and Coleen A. Butler-Rodriguez.

And I am grateful for the leadership and willingness of David Ruth, Superintendent for the National Parks Service in Central Virginia, and Julie Langan, Director of the State Historic Preservation Office at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, to serve as ad hoc advisors to the Commission.

The commission will hold two public meetings before the end of September, and dates, times and locations will be announced in the coming days. Residents will also be able to offer suggestions and input on a web site that has been created: That site is: www.monumentavenuecommission.org

In addition to taking on the responsibility of explaining the monuments that currently exist, I have also asked the commission to look into and solicit public opinion on changing the face of Monument

Avenue by adding new monuments that would reflect a broader, more inclusive story of our city. That is our goal.

*

I know there is pain in the history of our city. For many African Americans, that pain is personal. As an African American and the Mayor of this City, I am keenly aware that the past walks with us every day.

William Faulkner said: "The past isn't dead. It's not even past."

This is about our future. And if we want to redefine our city's future, we must correct the mistakes of its past in the present.

Sheffield Hale, the President and CEO of the Atlanta History Center, said: "The past has much to teach us about who we are, and where we are – if we let it."

We have a chance to advance the truth, the complete truth, by using these symbols not for celebration, but as tools to educate. I wish these monuments had never been built, but whether we like it or not, they are part of the history of this city. And removal would never wash away that stain.

And the need to educate and explain our history has never been more important than it is today. We live in an age of alternative facts and fake news, Holocaust deniers and 9/11 conspiracy theorists, spouting manipulative and misguided narratives designed to build walls between us, not bridges.

Whether they are cast in concrete or birthed in the cyber soup of social media, the hate that built them will not go away just because you tear it down, turn it off or unfollow it. That is especially true when it comes to issues of race in our country.

Recent surveys on our monuments and recent demonstrations in other parts of the country tell a story of division, and affirm the idea that racism doesn't start, nor will it end, because of some statues on a tree lined street – it resides in hearts and minds.

And the way to change hearts is to educate mind

*

Right now many people probably drive past these statutes and are impressed by their scale and grandeur.

But they don't realize that at the same time the statues on Monument Avenue were being erected between 1890 and 1919, the rights of African-Americans were being systematically removed.

In 1867, roughly 106,000 African American men were registered to vote in Virginia. By the time of the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1902 there were 147,000 African American men registered.

By 1905 there were fewer than 10,000.

Between 1867 and 1895, nearly 100 black Virginians served in the two houses of the General Assembly or in the Constitutional Convention of 1867–1868. By 1889, there were four black legislators left.

By the turn of the century, as Jim Crow took hold, there were no more black legislators in Virginia... until 1968.

Right now, you won't find that on any monument on Monument Avenue.

But the legacy of the long retreat from democracy that these Monuments commemorate lingers in our City to this very day.

See, having a complete history is important.

My recent visit to Montpelier, the home of our 4th president, James Madison, has set an example that is worthy of mention.

With the help of a generous benefactor, they just completed a massive renovation of the grounds that included restoration of the South Yard of the estate, where 281 slaves once toiled and suffered.

The people behind the restoration, and Montpelier's important new exhibit, the "Mere Distinction of Colour" believe that telling the complete story of our past is the bridge to a more enlightened future.

So, aside from telling the truth to what already exists, what does a "complete story" look like?

Well, I think we should consider what Monument Avenue would look like with a little more diversity.

Right now, Arthur Ashe stands alone as the only true champion on that street.

Nevertheless, Richmond's history includes other champions, of course – like the United States Colored Troops – who marched into this city on April 3, 1865 and raised the American flag.

And there are champions in modern times, like Oliver Hill, a defender of equality, who led and won one of the most important civil rights battles in our nation's history.

Richmond is unique among cities in many respects in how it has handled its complex and conflicted Civil War and Civil Rights history.

We WERE the Capital of the Confederacy and ARE the city of the first African-American Governor elected in the United States – L. Douglas Wilder.

We have expanded the conversation and understanding of history and erected a Reconciliation statue acknowledging this city's role in the Triangle Slave Trade in Shockoe Bottom.

And we are moving forward developing a plan to commemorate the Devil's Half Acre and Richmond's African Burial Ground along Shockoe Creek.

We have a statue of Abraham Lincoln and his son Tadd next to the American Civil War Museum, the only museum dedicated to telling the story of the Civil War from multiple perspectives: Union and Confederate, enslaved and free African Americans, soldiers and civilians.

Next month we will dedicate a new statue of Richmond's own Maggie Walker on Broad Street, and next year, an Emancipation statute will be commemorated on Brown's Island.

These are all important projects, and symbols that help educate and build a bridge to understanding by offering a more complete history.

But let me suggest another strategy to balancing the historical ledger in our City through.

Let's make our next monument a new school.

A new community center.

An alternative to public housing that restores dignity and pride of place.

America's history has been written and rewritten; and our struggle with race in this country persists – not because public monuments rise or fall, but because fear makes people falter.

But what lasts, the legacy that will endure, are the people we build, the minds we enlighten and the hearts we open on both sides.

When we do that, we will not just have a few new monuments. We will have thousands – LIVING monuments to understanding, inclusiveness, equality and promise.

They are the ones who will know the difference between myth and fact. They will know the difference between history and nostalgia.

They will embrace just causes -- not lost causes, and write the next chapter in the history of our city.

That is the opportunity before us. Telling the complete story of Monument Avenue is one very important step on the road to building One Richmond.

So, let's get to work and Make It Happen.

Thank you.

REMARKS BY MAYOR LEVAR M. STONEY- AUGUST 16, 2017

When I spoke about the monuments earlier this summer, it was from an optimism that we can take the power away from these statues by telling their true story, for the first time.

As I said in June, it is my belief that, as they currently stand without explanation, the confederate statues on Monument Avenue are a default endorsement of a shameful period in our national and city history that do not reflect the values of inclusiveness, equality and diversity we celebrate in today's Richmond.

I wish they had never been built.

Still, I believed that as a first step, there was a need to set the historical record straight. That is why I asked the Monument Avenue Commission to solicit public input and to suggest a complete and truthful narrative of these statues, who built them and why they were erected.

When it comes to these complicated questions that involve history, slavery, Jim Crow and war, we all must have the humility to admit that our answers are inherently inadequate. These are challenges so fundamental to the history of our country, commonwealth, and city that reducing them to the question of whether or not a monument should remain is, by definition, an oversimplification.

But context is important in both historical, and present day, perspectives. While we had hoped to use this process to educate Virginians about the history behind these monuments, the events of the last week may have fundamentally changed our ability to do so by revealing their power to serve as a rallying point for division and intolerance and violence.

Exhibit C



Levar M. Stoney ✓
@LevarStoney



Effective immediately, Monument Avenue Commission will include examination of removal and/or relocation of some or all confederate statues

5:09 PM · Aug 16, 2017



♥ 10.6K 💬 3.3K people are Tweeting about this

Exhibit D

When we do that, we will not just have a few new monuments. We will have thousands – LIVING monuments to understanding, inclusiveness, equality and promise.

They are the ones who will know the difference between myth and fact. They will know the difference between history and nostalgia.

They will embrace just causes -- not lost causes, and write the next chapter in the history of our city.

That is the opportunity before us. Telling the complete story of Monument Avenue is one very important step on the road to building One Richmond.

So, let's get to work and Make It Happen.

Thank you.

REMARKS BY MAYOR LEVAR M. STONEY- AUGUST 16, 2017

When I spoke about the monuments earlier this summer, it was from an optimism that we can take the power away from these statues by telling their true story, for the first time.

As I said in June, it is my belief that, as they currently stand without explanation, the confederate statues on Monument Avenue are a default endorsement of a shameful period in our national and city history that do not reflect the values of inclusiveness, equality and diversity we celebrate in today's Richmond.

I wish they had never been built.

Still, I believed that as a first step, there was a need to set the historical record straight. That is why I asked the Monument Avenue Commission to solicit public input and to suggest a complete and truthful narrative of these statues, who built them and why they were erected.

When it comes to these complicated questions that involve history, slavery, Jim Crow and war, we all must have the humility to admit that our answers are inherently inadequate. These are challenges so fundamental to the history of our country, commonwealth, and city that reducing them to the question of whether or not a monument should remain is, by definition, an oversimplification.

But context is important in both historical, and present day, perspectives. While we had hoped to use this process to educate Virginians about the history behind these monuments, the events of the last week may have fundamentally changed our ability to do so by revealing their power to serve as a rallying point for division and intolerance and violence.