

# STL Equity Matters

By Erika Whitfield • Apr 01, 2022  
Smart Brevity™ count: 4.5 mins... 1226 words

**Welcome to the seventh edition of our newsletter: STL Equity Matters**

**How it works:** We shine a light on how race is lived in our region.

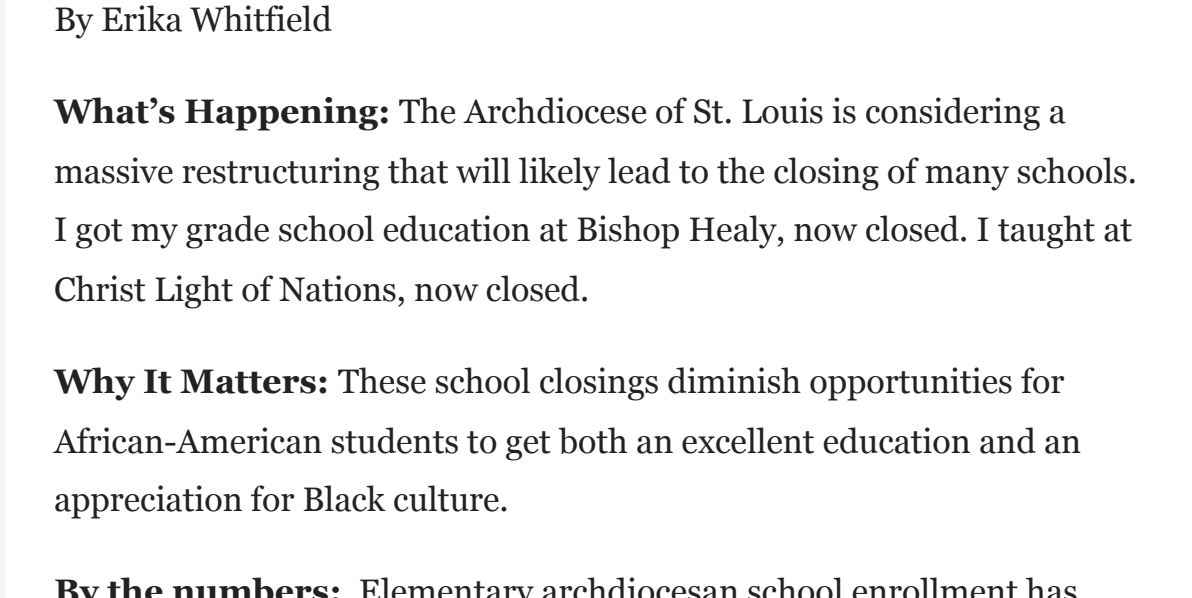
**Who is behind this:** This newsletter is brought to you by [Before Ferguson Beyond Ferguson](#), a non-profit racial equity storytelling project.

**In this edition:**

- **Erika Whitfield** reflects on the Archdiocese of St. Louis's effort to address shrinking enrollment in parish schools, particularly in north St. Louis city and county.
- **Sylvester Brown** assesses how St. Louis media approached the sudden, untimely death of Cora Faith Walker.
- Two timely takes on The Slap from **Aisha Sultan** and **Gerald Early**.
- **Marley Gardner**, a white student at majority-Black U. City high, calls on white residents to check their biases and support the school district.
- The Senate confirmation hearings for Supreme Court nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson brought back an unpleasant memory for **Mike Reid**.
- Talented filmmaker **Bruce Seymour** aims his lens at Black entrepreneurs.

*Let's dive in.*

## 1. Closing parish schools leaves an open wound



By Erika Whitfield

**What's Happening:** The Archdiocese of St. Louis is considering a massive restructuring that will likely lead to the closing of many schools. I got my grade school education at Bishop Healy, now closed. I taught at Christ Light of Nations, now closed.

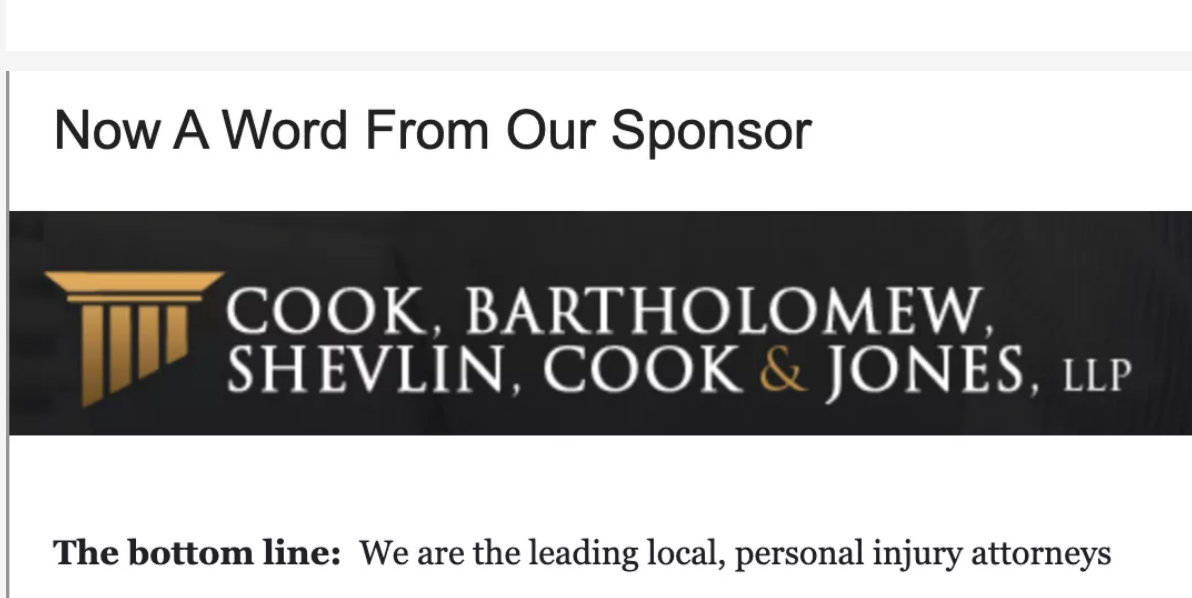
**Why It Matters:** These school closings diminish opportunities for African-American students to get both an excellent education and an appreciation for Black culture.

**By the numbers:** Elementary archdiocesan school enrollment has fallen from more than 40,000 in 2000 to 20,000 this year. There are just 10 Catholic grade schools left in the city of St. Louis, down from dozens 50 years ago. Only one of those ten elementary schools is north of Delmar Boulevard.

**My take:** The school closings leave an open wound across the region and call into question the Archdiocese's commitment to marginalized communities.

**Go Deeper:** [Read](#) my commentary and a [Post-Dispatch story](#) about the reorganization.

## 2. Ask Syl: What to make of the untimely death of Cora Faith Walker



Send your questions to [sylvesterbj@gmail.com](mailto:sylvesterbj@gmail.com)

Sylvester Brown, intrepid columnist, author and social justice warrior, offers guidance to those of us trying to navigate in a region fraught with racial tension.

**Question:** *What do you make of the media coverage of Cora Faith Walker's death? Along with an outpouring of grief came questions, anger and bitterness.*

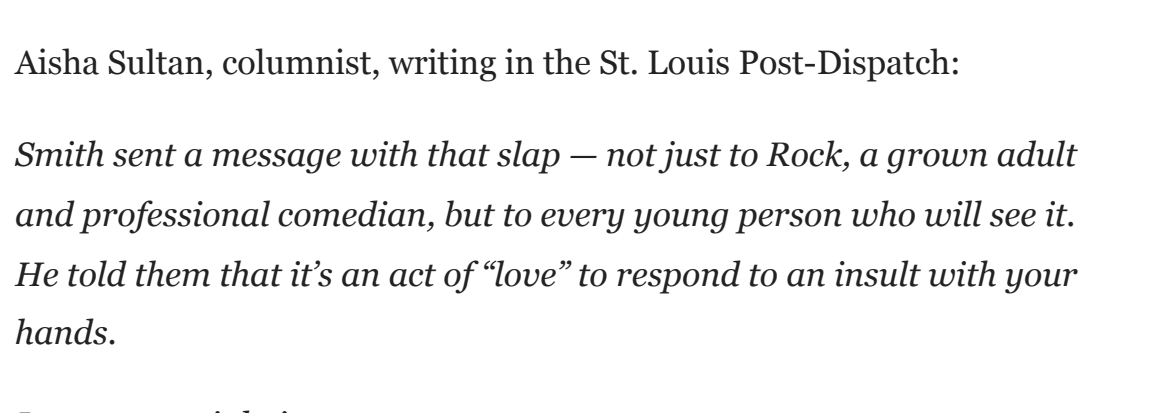
**Syl responds:** Decades of writing on Black issues and about Black people has left me convinced that white editors and writers cover Black people and Black politicians differently than they do their white counterparts. I find undue speculation and negative assumptions in the coverage and sometimes not-so-subtle insinuations of guilt before all the facts are disclosed.

Already burdened with these feelings, I was instantly put off by coverage of Walker's death on March 11.

**Go deeper:**

- [Syl's thoughts](#) on the media coverage.
- A Riverfront Times cover story: [Betrayed feelings may give context to outrage...](#)

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[Learn more about Cook, Bartholomew...](#)

## 3. Local writers react to The Slap

### The Slap Heard Round the World, or What is the Sound of One Hand Clapping?

Gerald Early  
MARCH 28, 2022

**What's happening:** Did anyone not have a take on The Slap? Even if you are uninterested in movies, award shows and tennis, Will Smith's assault on comic Chris Rock, captured live on TV, was hard to miss.

We waded through a social media thicket of wit and wisdom on your behalf to find two local gems. They are decidedly different, but each satisfying in their own way.

**See if you agree:** We'll know if you click on the link to read more:

**What they're saying:** Dr. Gerald Early, professor of English and African-American Studies at Washington University, writing in the Common Reader:

*I learned last night while catching up on the news that Will Smith slapped Chris Rock on the stage of the 94th Academy Awards ceremony, aka the Oscars, for making a joke about Smith's wife. Now, I thought, the Oscars have figured out how to make this long, boring show interesting: have the participants assault each other. Next year, they could have the participants have spontaneous sex on stage and give us the complete complement that is the stock-in-trade of this industry: sex and violence.*

[Find the essay in full at the Common Reader...](#)

Aisha Sultan, columnist, writing in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch:

*Smith sent a message with that slap — not just to Rock, a grown adult and professional comedian, but to every young person who will see it. He told them that it's an act of "love" to respond to an insult with your hands.*

*It most certainly is not.*

*It's an act of violence...*

*Those who lack the protection of superstar fame and wealth don't get standing ovations after they hit someone. They get suspended from school. Or they get sent to jail. Or in places like Missouri, where anyone could be carrying a gun at any time, they get shot.*

[Read the column in full in the P-D...](#)

## 4. If you love U City...



Marley Gardner sent a message to University City residents.

**What's happening:** Marley Gardner, is white and in the minority at University City High School. Gardner and other white students treasure the diversity they find at school. But they encounter "not-so-subtle racist and classist" remarks from white adults who express concerns.

"Do you feel safe?" they are asked.

"Are there other people like you?"

"What about the test scores?"

**Why it matters:** "White people are full of negative ideas of the school we love," Gardner writes. "They don't know about the fiercely devoted community of advocates, the talented artists and the endlessly supportive staff. They also don't know about the plethora of opportunities available to students like the Early College program, the EMT program or the robotics team. The reason they don't know this is simple: they don't care to try."

**Re-examine your assumptions:** "We're not a bad school because our test scores aren't as high as neighboring districts like Clayton and Ladue. We're not a bad school because not all of our students go to college. And we're not a bad school because we're predominantly Black. We're a school full of future artists, athletes, activists, musicians, entrepreneurs, doctors and endless other possibilities."

**Go deeper:** [Read Gardner's analysis and commentary...](#)

## 4. 'Much deeper than that'



Mike and Zuri Reid. (Photo provided by Mike Reid)

**What's happening:** Many found the questions and comments directed at Supreme Court nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson during her confirmation hearing patronizing and disrespectful. The hearing brought back a memory for Mike Reid, executive director of the Skinker DeBaliviere Community Council, and proud father of a highly accomplished daughter.

**Why it matters:** Through a short post on Facebook, Reid describes how he and his daughter take on and absorb implicit bias.

**Go deeper:** [Mike Reid's memory...](#)

## 6. Focusing his lens on Black entrepreneurs



Mack Hill, owner of Mack's Bar & Grill. (From Bruce Seymour's video)

**What's happening:** Filmmaker Bruce Seymour is engaged in a passion project focusing on Black entrepreneurs in St. Louis's Central West End. His first two subjects are Jason Wilson of Northwest Coffee and Mack Hill of Mack's Bar & Grill.

**Making the CWE tick:** "We are creating an environment that is comfortable for everyone, says Hill, whose restaurant features a bar, restaurant seating, a game room, pool, darts and will soon have a cigar lounge. Wilson has been a fixture in the CWE for decades and on Laclede Avenue since 2005. He recently opened a shop at Schnucks in Webster Groves.

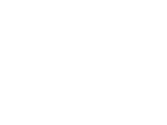
**Go deeper:** [Watch the videos and subscribe to Seymour's channel for more.](#)

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