

STL Equity Matters

By Erika Whitfield • Aug 23, 2022
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Welcome to the 13th 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:

- **Reparations for descendants of slaves** are getting an increasing amount of attention, particularly in faith-based communities. But there is many a slip between cup and lip.
- **Habitat for Humanity St. Louis gets a rave review** in the Washington Post for its neighborhood revitalization efforts.
- **Two books and an essay**, one from entrepreneur and philanthropist **Randy Sanderson** and the others from retired TV anchor **Julius Hunter** delight, inspire and entertain.
- **Before Ferguson became notorious**, there was Kinloch, writes **Sylvester Brown Jr.**
- **Lea-Rachel Kosnik**, a professor at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, shares Chapter 13 about the challenges a white mother faces in adopting a Black child in a novel we are serializing at Before Ferguson Beyond Ferguson.

Let's dive in.

1. Julius Hunter: Anchor, Author, Historian, Raconteur



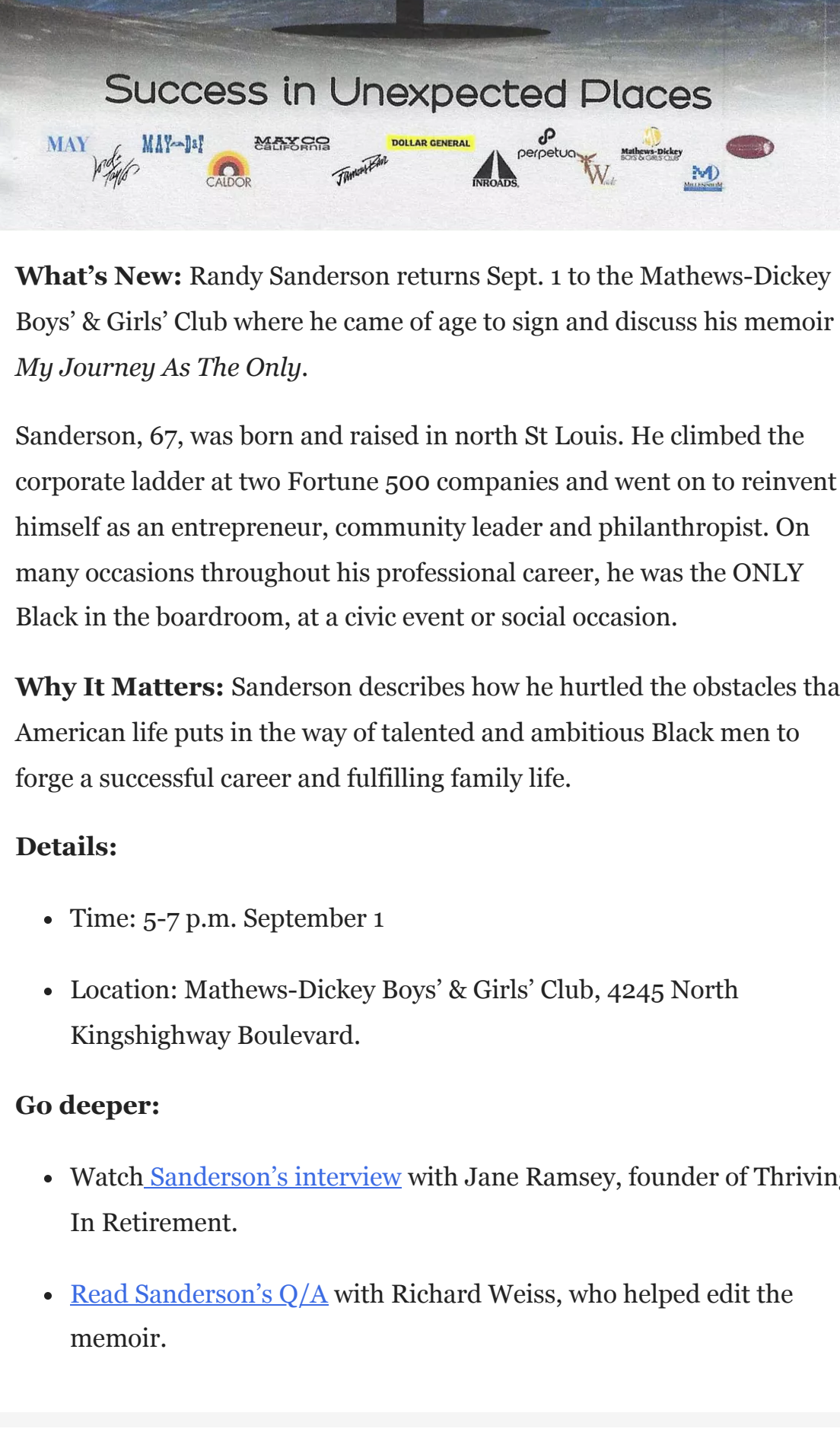
Julius Hunter at a recent presentation and book signing at Left Bank Books. (Photo by Wiley Price Jr.)

What's New: The redoubtable, retired anchor Julius Hunter, 79, has been busy. He has published a new book, and recently authored a compelling account in the St. Louis American about how enslaved and formerly enslaved people were a major labor force in the construction of the Capitol.

“George Washington and the founding fathers had planned to hire cheap labor from Europe to construct the majestic D.C. government buildings on the drawing boards. But the call overseas for laborers got a basic yawn.

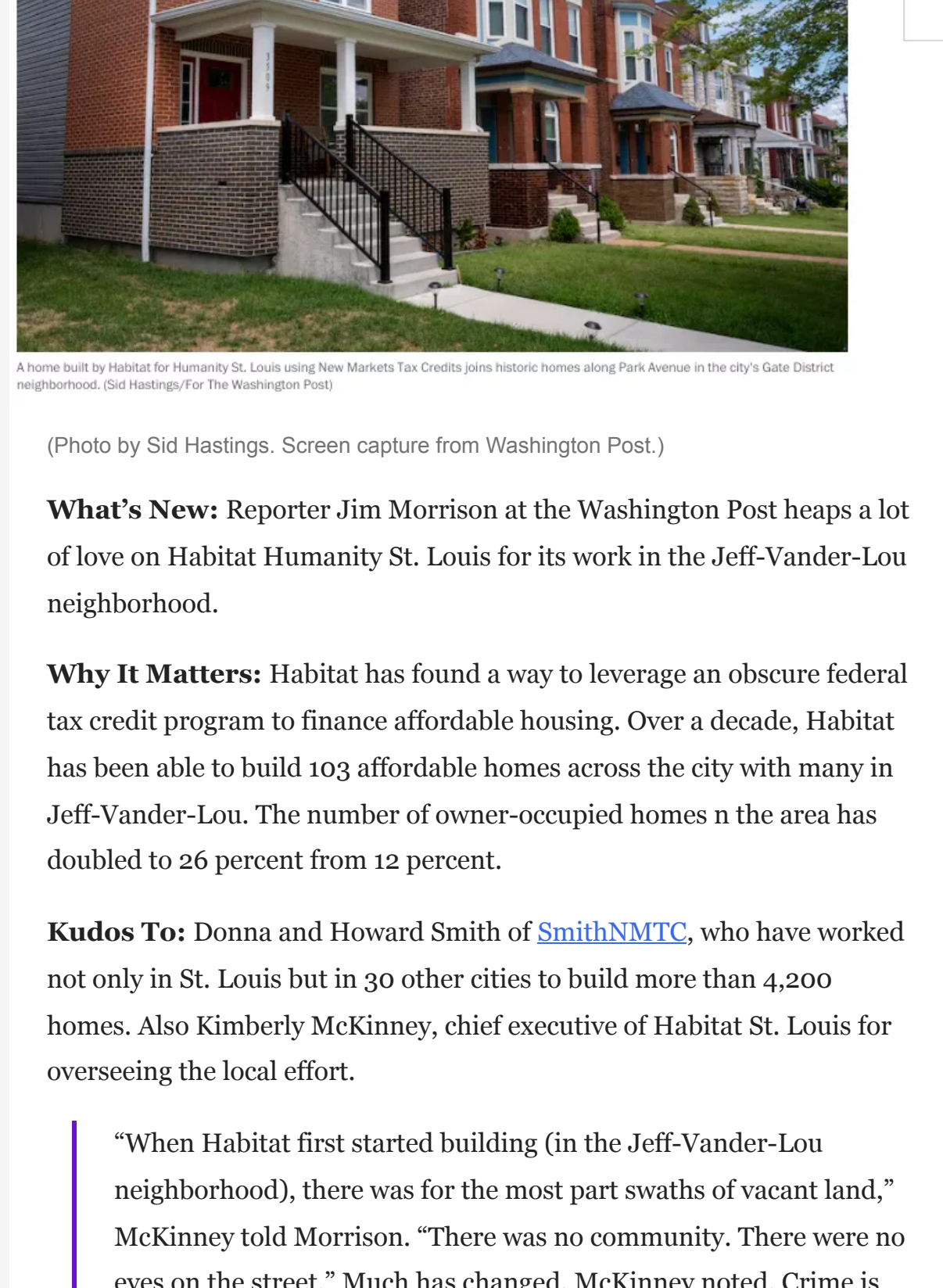
“So, the nation’s first government leaders turned to free labor right under their noses: enslaved African workers. And then there was that cheapest force for back-breaking work: African American freedmen.”

Read Hunter’s commentary in the [St. Louis American](#).



And Hot Off The Presses: Professor Julius K. Hunter’s *Stuff You Never Knew About St. Louis*. It features 309 juicy, fun facts about our hometown with hilarious artwork by illustrator Todd Bauman. Hunter drew an SRO crowd July 7 for the book launch at Left Bank Books. You can learn more about the book and how to order at [juliushunter.com](#). Watch a video of Hunter’s performance at [Left Bank Books](#).

2. Sanderson Debuts ‘The Only’



What’s New: Randy Sanderson returns Sept. 1 to the Mathews-Dickey Boys’ & Girls’ Club where he came of age to sign and discuss his memoir *My Journey As The Only*.

Sanderson, 67, was born and raised in north St. Louis. He climbed the corporate ladder at two Fortune 500 companies and went on to reinvent himself as an entrepreneur, community leader and philanthropist. On many occasions throughout his professional career, he was the ONLY Black in the boardroom, at a civic event or social occasion.

Why It Matters: Sanderson describes how he hurdled the obstacles that American life puts in the way of talented and ambitious Black men to forge a successful career and fulfilling family life.

Details:

- Time: 5-7 p.m. September 1
- Location: Mathews-Dickey Boys’ & Girls’ Club, 4245 North Kingshighway Boulevard.

Go deeper:

- Watch [Sanderson’s interview](#) with Jane Ramsey, founder of Thriving In Retirement.
- [Read Sanderson’s Q/A](#) with Richard Weiss, who helped edit the memoir.

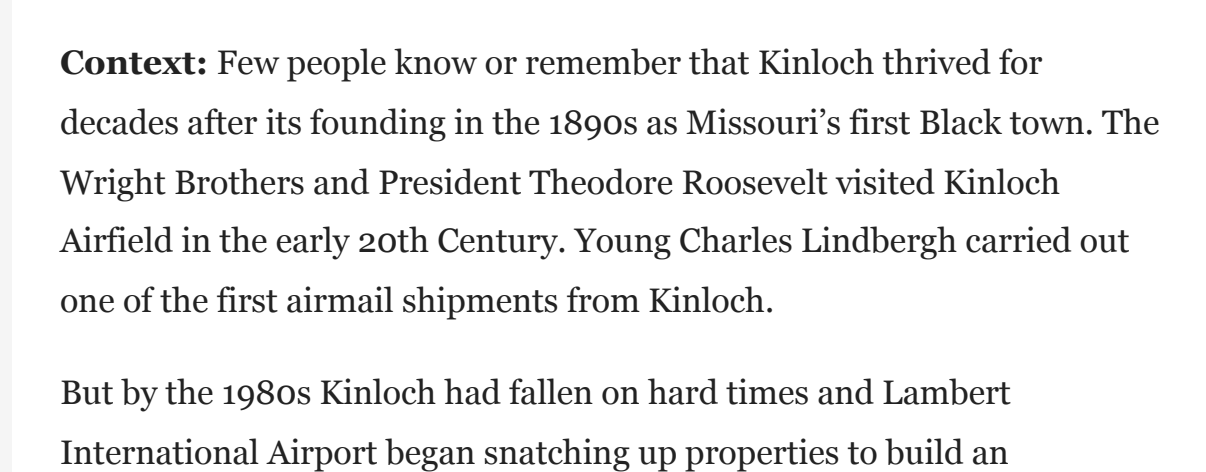
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3. Jeff-Vander-Lou Project Draws National Attention



A home built by Habitat for Humanity St. Louis using New Markets Tax Credits joins historic homes along Park Avenue in the city’s Gate District neighborhood. (Sid Hastings/For The Washington Post)

(Photo by Sid Hastings. Screen capture from Washington Post.)

What’s New: Reporter Jim Morrison at the Washington Post heaps a lot of love on Habitat Humanity St. Louis for its work in the Jeff-Vander-Lou neighborhood.

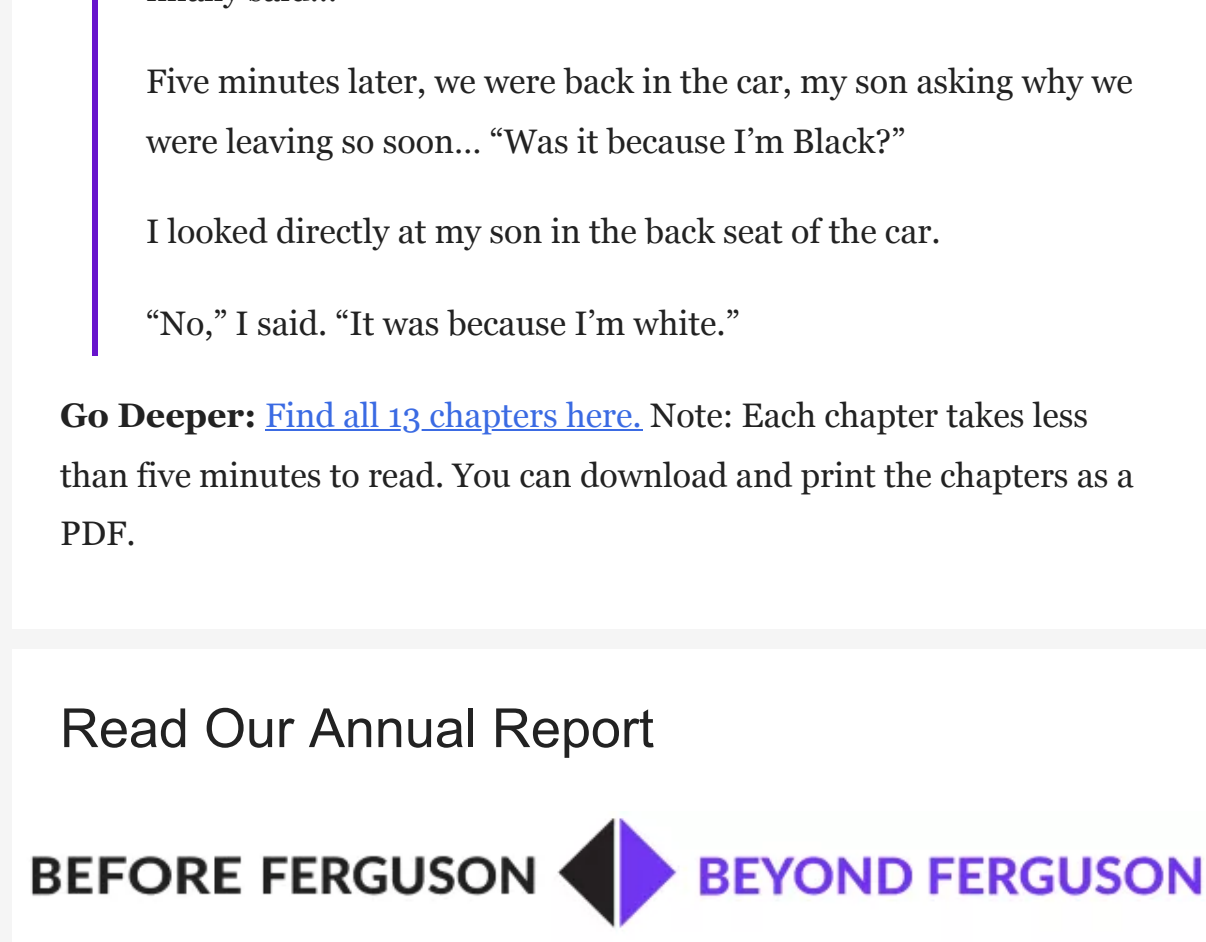
Why It Matters: Habitat has found a way to leverage an obscure federal tax credit program to finance affordable housing. Over a decade, Habitat has been able to build 103 affordable homes across the city with many in Jeff-Vander-Lou. The number of owner-occupied homes in the area has doubled to 26 percent from 12 percent.

Kudos To: Donna and Howard Smith of [SmithNMT](#), who have worked not only in St. Louis but in 30 other cities to build more than 4,200 homes. Also Kimberly McKinney, chief executive of Habitat St. Louis for overseeing the local effort.

“When Habitat first started building (in the Jeff-Vander-Lou neighborhood), there was for the most part swaths of vacant land,” McKinney told Morrison. “There was no community. There were no eyes on the street.” Much has changed, McKinney noted. Crime is down. And there are more eyes on the street coming from well-maintained two- and three-bedroom homes.

Go Deeper: [Read Morrison’s story](#), which was also published in the Post-Dispatch.

4. Faith-based Communities Struggle To Address Reparations



What’s New: [The Washington Post reports](#): “The U.S. branch of the Jesuits pledged to raise \$100 million for a reconciliation initiative in partnership with descendants of people once enslaved by the Catholic order. Last week, a leader of those descendants expressed deep dissatisfaction with the order’s lack of progress.”

Why It Matters: Joseph Stewart, in a publicly released letter to the head of the order, contends the Jesuits have failed to uphold their side of the partnership with the urgency the circumstances demand.

The Jesuits “are in a state of disillusionment,” Stewart said.

Context: Stewart and other descendants are the progeny of 272 enslaved men, women and children sold in 1838 by the Jesuit owners of Georgetown University to Louisiana plantation owners to pay off the school’s debts. Their partnership and joint creation of the Descendants Truth & Reconciliation Foundation was announced in March 2021. The Jesuits pledged to raise \$100 million within five years with a broader goal of reaching \$1 billion from an array of donors.

Locally: Last year the Archdiocese created the [Forgive Us Our Trespasses](#) project. The project acknowledges that three bishops and many clergy were slaveowners, said Joyce Jones, program director for racial harmony in the Archdiocese of St. Louis. She is overseeing a group that is searching for descendants of slaves.

Go Deeper: The Virginia Episcopal Diocese [pledged to spend \\$10 million](#) for reparations. But is having difficulty sorting out how to do it.

6. Ask Syl: Before Ferguson, There Was Kinloch

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. Send your questions to Sylvester at [sylvesterb@ gmail.com](#) and we promise a thoughtful response that will be shared with the community. If your question is selected, we’ll send you a \$25 gift card to Northwest Coffee.

Today’s question comes from C.B. whose father and uncle once owned gas stations in Kinloch.

“Why doesn’t anyone ever talk about the atrocities that occurred to Kinloch and its connection to Ferguson?”

Syl Responds: Well actually, C.B., some people have. Former State Sen. Jeff Smith in a commentary for the New Republic spoke to the social and economic tragedies that befell Kinloch and provided a historical link to Ferguson.

Context: Few people know or remember that Kinloch thrived for decades after its founding in the 1890s as Missouri’s first Black town. The Wright Brothers and President Theodore Roosevelt visited Kinloch Airfield in the early 20th Century. Young Charles Lindbergh carried out one of the first airmail shipments from Kinloch.

But by the 1980s Kinloch had fallen on hard times and Lambert International Airport began snatching up properties to build an additional runway

Aftermath: From 1990 to 2000, Kinloch shed over 80 percent of its population and many displaced residents moved to Ferguson, with some taking up residence in housing complex called Canfield Green. Canfield Green is where Michael Brown was killed. The complex was recently sold and is now called Pleasant View Gardens.

Go Deeper: [Read Syl’s response in full.](#)

7. A Jaw-dropping Experience

What’s new: Lea-Rachel Kosnik shares Chapter 13 in a semi-autobiographical novel we are serializing at Before Ferguson Beyond Ferguson. The story is about white parents who have adopted a Black child.

In Chapter 13: A visit to the orthodontist becomes a jaw-dropping experience when the receptionist asks Rachel for papers that prove she is Miles’ mother.

“Excuse me?” I asked in disbelief. I narrowed my eyes and tried to stare down my nose at this ignorant receptionist, to indicate to her that I was offended by her suggestion, but she failed to acknowledge my nonverbal accusation and remained quiet, still.

“Unless you can prove you are his mother, we can’t see the boy,” she finally said...

Five minutes later, we were back in the car, my son asking why we were leaving so soon... “Was it because I’m Black?”

I looked directly at my son in the back seat of the car.

“No,” I said. “It was because I’m white.”

Go Deeper: [Find all 13 chapters here.](#) Note: Each chapter takes less than five minutes to read. You can download and print the chapters as a PDF.

Read Our Annual Report

BEFORE FERGUSON **BEYOND FERGUSON**

ANNUAL REPORT

Greetings to all of you who have been following and supporting our racial equity non-profit storytelling project Before Ferguson Beyond Ferguson. Here is our annual report documenting our work for 2021 and goals for 2022.

Click on the image to read the report.

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