

STL Equity Matters

By Erika Whitfield • Sep 22, 2022
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Welcome to the 14th 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. Our org is rebranding and joining forces with the [River City Journalism Fund](#). More about that in the next newsletter.

In this edition:

- **Pro Publica's Jeremy Kohler** (a former St. Louis Post-Dispatch reporter) shines a light on how law enforcement favors privileged St. Louis neighborhoods.
- **Quest, a St. Louis non-profit**, provides St. Louis teens with a first foreign experience. McKinley High senior Zack Bailey describes how it changed his world.
- **St. Louis Public Radio's** Marissanne Lewis-Thompson finds an increasing number of African-American parents and students are turning to homeschooling.
- **The upcoming mid-term elections are enormously significant.** Dance the Vote STL is hosting a family-friendly event to get you registered and ready.
- **Have right-wing attacks on wokeness put journalists on the defensive?** Sylvester Brown Jr. responds.
- **Erika Whitfield spotlights Leah Lee**, who says she liberates marginalized communities with urban gardening.
- **Lea-Rachel Kosnik**, a professor at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, shares Chapter 17 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. 'Doin' it Our Way': Black Families Turn To Homeschooling



Screen capture from "Doin' It Our Way," a podcast focusing on African-American families homeschooling their children. (Photo by Brian Munoz)

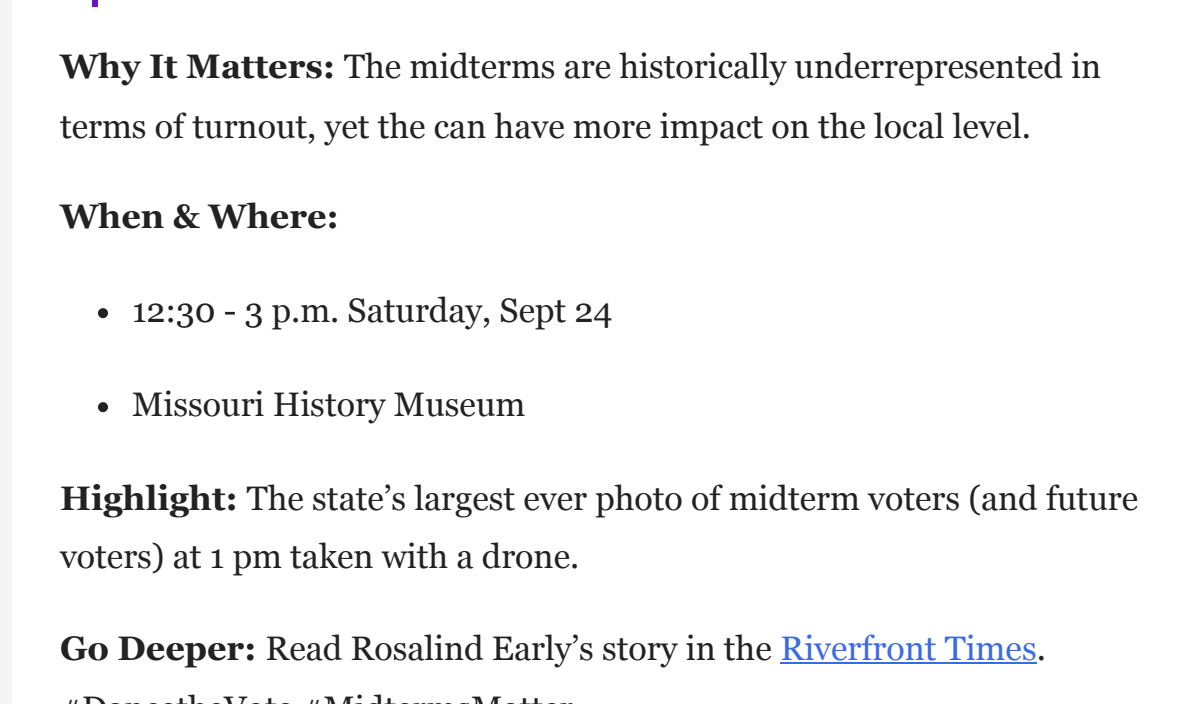
What's New: In a compelling three-part podcast, St. Louis Public Radio's Marissanne Lewis-Thompson shares some personal history about her struggles at a private school then turns her attention to St. Louis families who have turned to homeschooling.

Why it matters: Local parents say their children struggle with insensitive teachers who show little regard for their backgrounds or their interests.

"I could just see my kids were just falling apart," said one mother. "I know as a mom, we all have jobs outside of our homes. But as a mom, my first job is to my babies. My first job is to make sure that they're OK and they are getting everything that they need. I knew in my heart that they just weren't."

You can both read and listen to Lewis-Thompson's account at [St. Louis Public Radio](#).

2. Policing for the Privileged



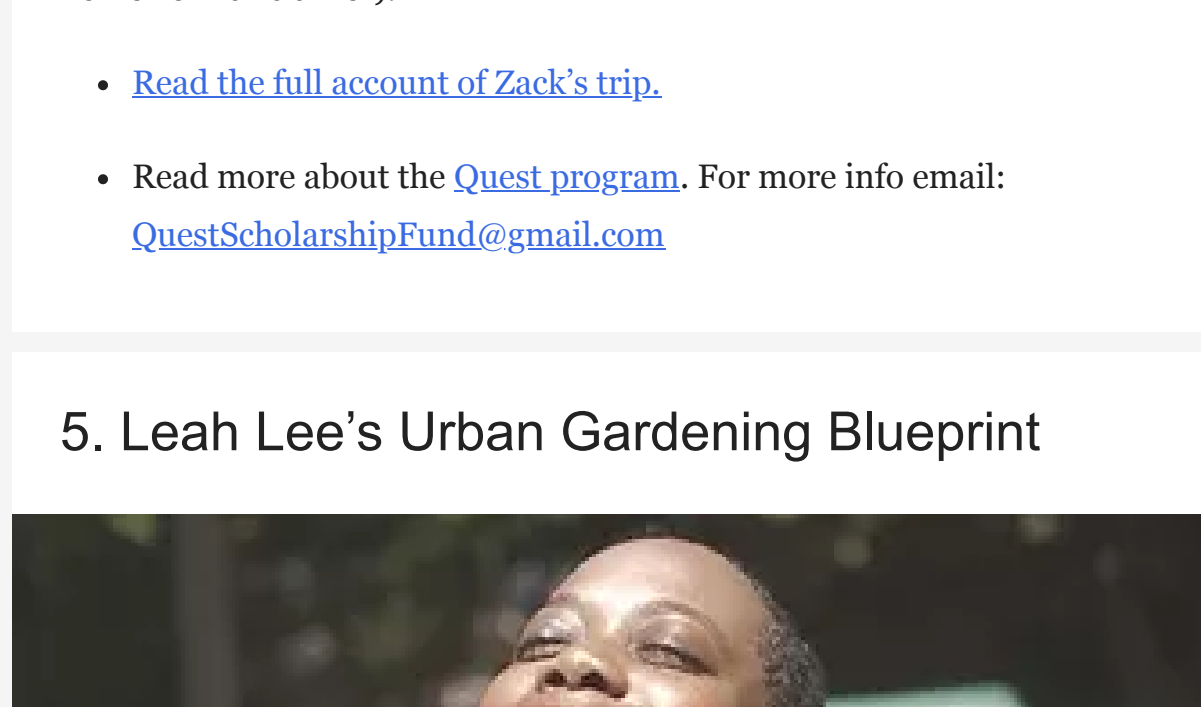
What's New: "Wealthier neighborhoods in St. Louis have armed themselves with private police, giving them a level of service poor areas can't afford and fueling racial and economic disparities," says Pro Publica's Jeremy Kohler.

Why it matters: A private security firm, The City's Finest, is staffed by off-duty police officers and sells its services at a premium to neighborhood groups that can afford it. Meanwhile low-income and minority residents suffer high rates of crime because the city can't afford to hire enough officers to patrol their neighborhoods.

"The City's Finest has raised its pay to exceed the (St. Louis Police) department's overtime rate -- in essence outbidding the police department for its own workforce."

Go Deeper: Kohler is a former public safety reporter for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and the newspaper ran his story at the top of the front page of its Sunday edition. Read his story as presented at [Pro Publica](#).

3. Fred & Ginger Want You At The Polls



Dance the Vote STL returns to the St. Louis History Museum Saturday, Sept. 24. This is a YouTube screen capture from a previous event.

What's New: Fred Astaire & Ginger Rogers, the debonair dancers of yesteryear, are no longer with us, but we think they'd be on board with [Dance the Vote STL](#).

The nonpartisan [event](#) will feature St. Louis dance companies, including the St. Louis Academy of Dance and Skystone Dance Ensemble, doing interpretive dances around the act of voting.

"We promote the joy of voting and highlight the excitement about this precious right of citizenship," says Joan Lipkin, producing artistic director of Dance the Vote.

Why It Matters: The midterms are historically underrepresented in terms of turnout, yet the can have more impact on the local level.

When & Where:

- 12:30 - 3 p.m. Saturday, Sept 24
- Missouri History Museum

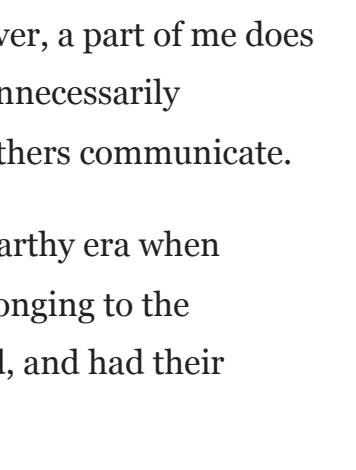
Highlight: The state's largest ever photo of midterm voters (and future voters) at 1 pm taken with a drone.

Go Deeper: Read Rosalind Early's story in the [Riverfront Times](#).

#DancetheVote #MidtermsMatter

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4. Foreign Travel Expands Horizons For Urban Youth



Zack Bailey with his host family in Argentina.

What's new: Local scholars from disadvantaged St. Louis families have returned from their first visits overseas.

Why it matters: Quest is a St. Louis non-profit that provides opportunities to students to step outside their communities and develop a global vision.

- Students from 24 St. Louis high schools have participated so far.
- In many cases, students have never been to other parts of the U.S. or flown on a plane or owned a debit card.
- Quest volunteers help students develop life skills that provide a boost for their college years and they stay in touch with them throughout,

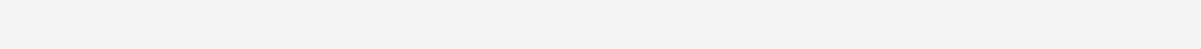
Zack's experience: Zack Bailey, a student at McKinley Classical Arts Academy, visited Argentina.

"I was probably the only Black person in the province, and I was visibly American. I couldn't help turning heads everywhere I went. It was like being the most popular kid in school. But I would get headaches from the amount of conversations I had to have with people in Spanish..."

What's next: Zack says he hopes Quest can send more students on foreign visits and he'd like to return to Argentina ("but without the homework this time").

- [Read the full account of Zack's trip.](#)
- Read more about the [Quest program](#). For more info email: [QuestScholarshipFund@gmail.com](#)

5. Leah Lee's Urban Gardening Blueprint



By Erika Whitfield

What's New: Urban gardening is flourishing and at the forefront is Leah Lee, who sees it as an act of liberation for disadvantaged St. Louisans.

Why It Matters: Inflation is taking a huge bite out of everyone's budget, but it's particularly so for large families with a single wage earner or those with dietary restrictions.

Practical Advice: Lee provides a blueprint for families with small lots to yield the greatest results.

- **Hint:** A variety of containers can help with the planting.

Reap What You Sow: Lee has grown so much produce she hosts a weekly food giveaway at the corner of Hamilton and Maple avenues in north St. Louis.

Go Deeper: [Read Whitfield's story.](#)

6. Ask Syl: Are Journalists Too Woke?

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 to [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.

R.V.R asks:

"With a perceived increase in America's social consciousness and the rise of the Millennial's "woke" movement, does political correctness hinder honesty in journalism?"

Syl Responds: Republicans, for the most part, have demonized "woke" for political gain. Such is the case with U.S. Sen. Josh Hawley's pandering use of "woke mob" to sell copies of his recently published book. In Republican speeches, tweets or talking points, the country is being destroyed by "wokeness."

Millennials Take It To Far: I don't agree with conservatives' all-encompassing claims of dangerous wokeness. However, a part of me does subscribe to the idea that Millennial "wokeness" is unnecessarily impacting how writers, politicians, comedians and others communicate.

I urge the "woke crowd" to remember the McCarthy era when politicians accused people in Hollywood of belonging to the Communist Party. Many were blacklisted, fired, and had their reputations destroyed.

Go Deeper: [Syl also discusses his use of the N-Word...](#)

7. 'Overcome with Shame'

What's new: Lea-Rachel Kosnik shares Chapter 17 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 17: Rachel's son, Miles, finds a soul mate, another Black student in a school that is mostly white. This, at first, pleases Rachel, but then she is forced to confront her own implicit bias. Miles's friend had given Rachel a holiday gift that seemed way beyond his means. Had it been stolen, she wondered? Then second thoughts....

"This was a recurring experience for me. Suspecting myself of racial bias, and then being extremely embarrassed by it. A few months before I'd been driving in downtown St. Louis and was stopped at a stoplight when a group of three Black teenage boys approached my car. Immediately, I'd locked the doors and pushed my purse beneath the passenger seat. And then in the very next instant, I noticed the white bucket the boys were carrying, stenciled with the name of a veteran's charity in black ink on the side. I'd been overcome with shame. A red hot shame that actually made my hands shake as they fell into my lap ...

What did it say about me that I so easily assumed the worst about my son's best friend?

Go Deeper: [Find all 17 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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