

STL Equity Matters

By Erika Whitfield • Dec 20, 2021

Smart Brevity® count: 4 mins...1030 words

Welcome to the fourth edition of our newsletter: STL Equity Matters

How it works: We are here to shine a light on how race is lived in our region. We look back, we look ahead, and we are very much in the now.

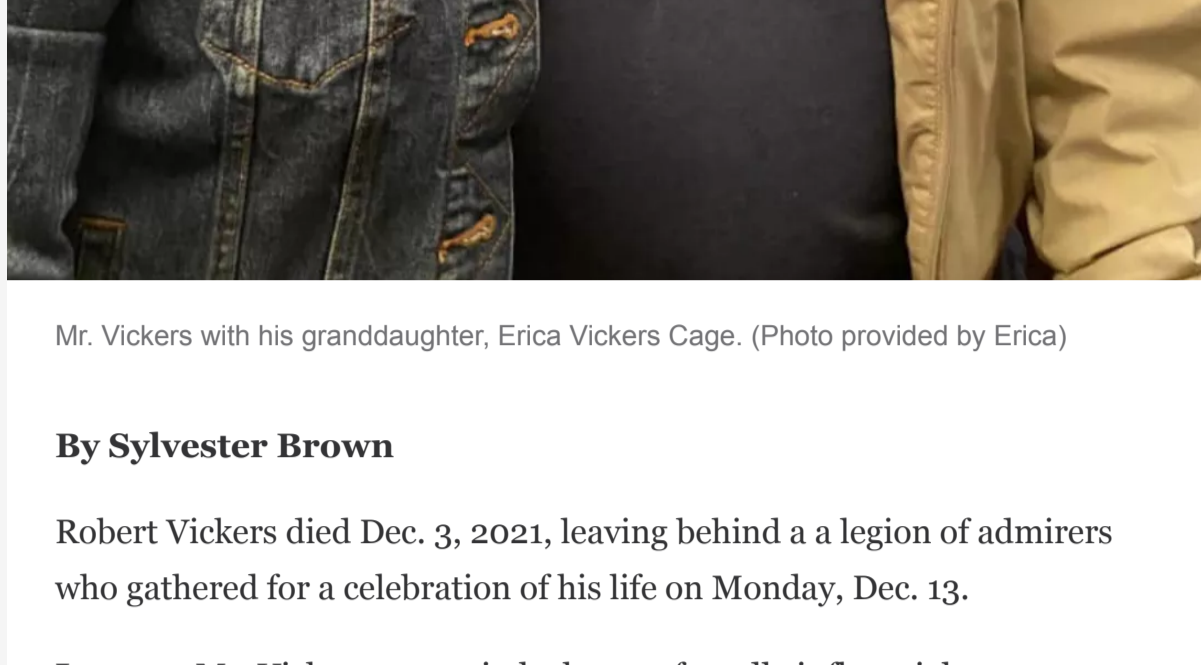
Who is behind this: This newsletter is brought to you by [Before Ferguson Beyond Ferguson](#), a non-profit racial equity storytelling project.

In this edition:

- **Robert Vickers**, influential educator and community role model, dies.
- **Post-Dispatch** sounds the alarm about evictions.
- **Erika Whitfield**, educator and parent, calls out the patriarchy.
- With **Stefani Weeden-Smith** at the helm, 11 STL institutions take on a leadership role in reviving north side.
- **PBS' Gabrielle Hays** shines a light on St. Louis Jesuits and slavery.
- **KSDK's Christine Byers** interviews former Ladue officer who shot and then reconciled with Black suspect.

Let's dive in.

1. Robert Vickers, influential educator and activist, dies at 94



Mr. Vickers with his granddaughter, Erica Vickers Cage. (Photo provided by Erica)

By Sylvester Brown

Robert Vickers died Dec. 3, 2021, leaving behind a a legion of admirers who gathered for a celebration of his life on Monday, Dec. 13.

Legacy: Mr. Vickers was quietly, but profoundly influential as an educator, community role model, and as the patriarch of a family stirring up good trouble . He and his family were among the first African-Americans to purchase a home south of Olive Street Road in University City, confronting racist pushback as they did so.

Defining an epoch: Mr. Vickers complicated family history and his journey to eminence as an educator and civic leader defined how race was lived in our region from the Depression-era up to the present day.

A Memory: Mr. Vickers remembered not being able to believe what he was seeing on television on July 12, 1999, as a group of 300 protestors descended the western ramp from Goodfellow Boulevard onto Interstate 70. With protest signs and chants like “No Justice, No Peace,” they stopped, stood and sat on the highway. The event had been orchestrated by Eric Vickers. Mr. Vickers and his wife, Claire, were at once appalled and proud by what their son had accomplished.

Go deeper: [Sylvester Brown tells the story of Robert Vickers](#). It is a saga.

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The bottom line: We are the leading local, personal injury attorneys

Who we are: Cook, Bartholomew, Shevlin, Cook & Jones, LLP in Belleville, Illinois, brings together the diverse experience of some of the most highly recognized plaintiffs’ attorneys in the area.

- We work collaboratively to deliver optimal counsel and resolution for our clients. Members of our firm are AV-rated and have been selected for inclusion in the Super Lawyers list.
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- We are active in charitable giving and participate widely in the local community. That’s why we are a sponsor for STL Equity Matters.

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

2. In a diverse world, many stories matter



By Erika Whitfield

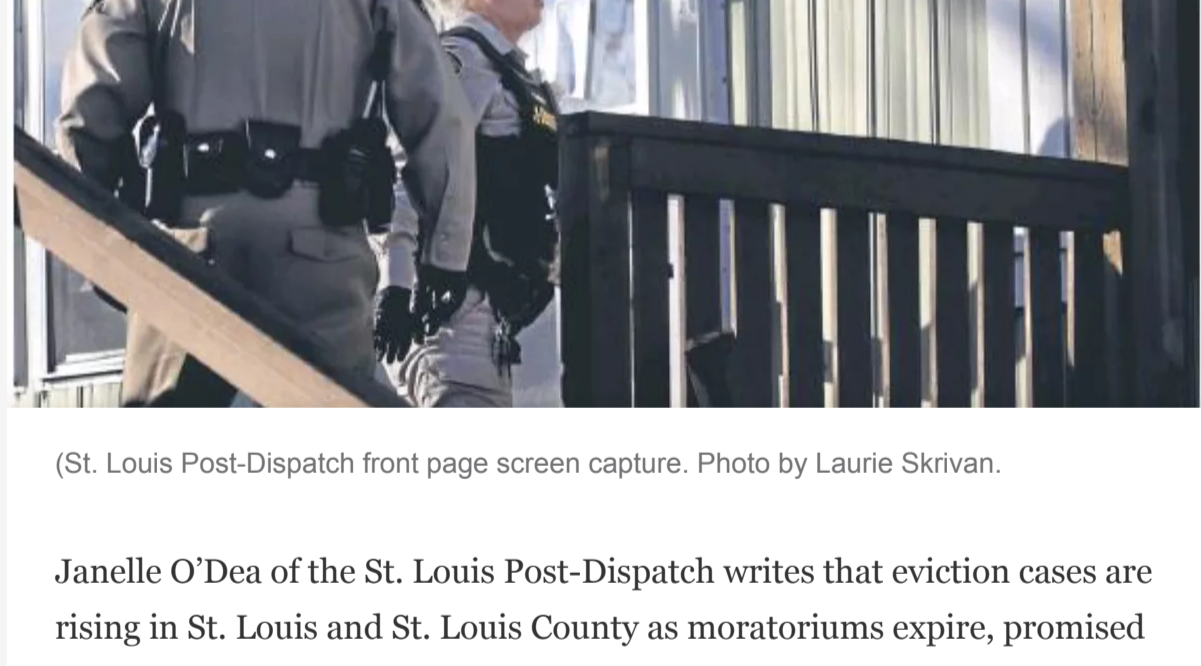
Let’s Be Clear: Banning books isn’t about protecting innocent children. It is a form of White conservative control.

Context: The people out to remove books are targeting the stories of Black, Brown and Queer folks that challenge white patriarchy, such as Monster by Walter Dean Myers.

Why it’s important: Multiple perspectives drive understanding and empathy especially when it comes to race and gender identity.

Go deeper: [Read about my experience with Myers’ book at a St. Louis Archdiocesan school.](#)

3. PBS NewsHour focuses on St. Louis Jesuits’ role in slavery



At least 200 people were enslaved by the Jesuits in St. Louis. Descendants are now telling their stories

(Screen capture from PBS website)

Rashonda Alexander, a 2002 Saint Louis University graduate, was shocked to learn that she was the descendant of enslaved people owned by the Jesuits, reports Gabrielle Hays for the PBS NewsHour.

Why it matters: Descendants are reclaiming the stories of their ancestors and asking institutions to tell the story of what happened and the harm that was done.

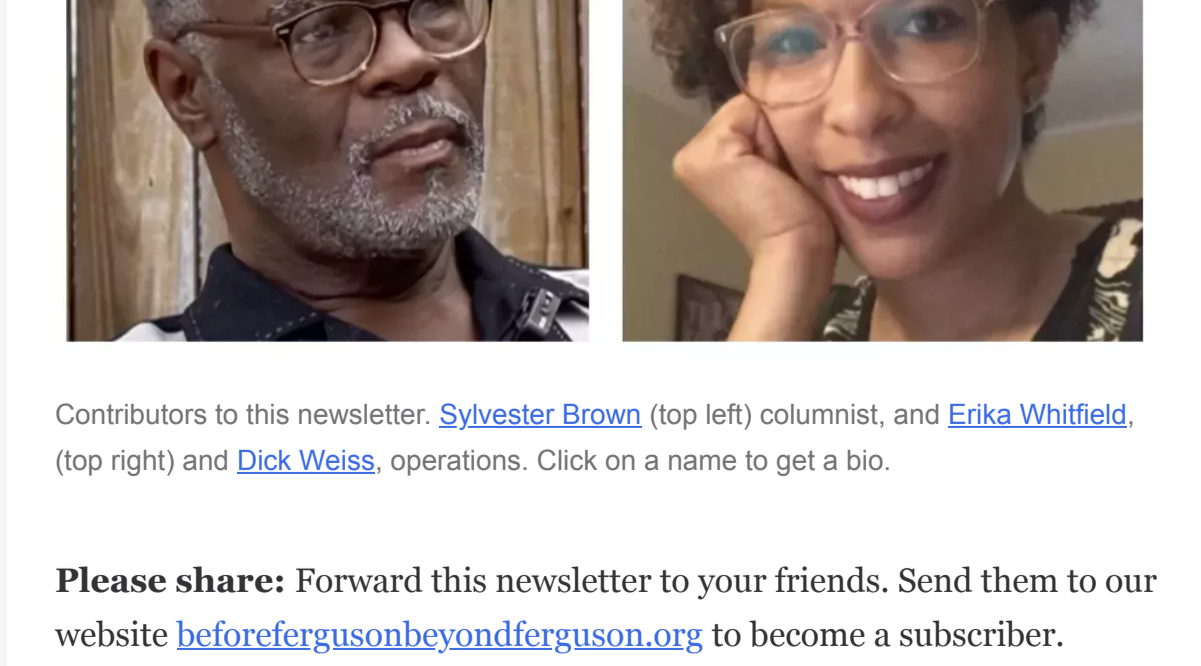
Context: The Jesuits have promised to be accountable. Fr. Jeffrey Harrison, SJ is coordinator of the Slavery, History, Memory and Reconciliation Project in St. Louis. “Almost from the beginning we engaged in some forms of human slavery,” Harrison told PBS. “We’ve come up with a number of about 200 over time that were either directly owned, rented or hired” between 1823 and the end of slavery in St. Louis.

For Alexander, it’s personal: “I attended the university my ancestors built for free. I kept thinking, ‘Are we walking on their bones? Did I walk past somewhere where they were beaten?’”

Homegrown news: Reporter Gabrielle Hays is a St. Louis-based communities correspondent reporter the NewsHour. She grew up in north St. Louis and attended Cardinal Ritter College Prep. [Read her report.](#)

4. As the pandemic ratchets up, renters are getting the boot

‘WE’RE GOING TO HAVE TO START PUTTING PEOPLE OUT’
Evictions rising again in St. Louis area



(St. Louis Post-Dispatch front page screen capture. Photo by Laurie Skriwan.

Janelle O’Dea of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch writes that eviction cases are rising in St. Louis and St. Louis County as moratoriums expire, promised aid has not yet arrived, and the pandemic remains a serious threat.

Why it matters: Evictions could lead to overcrowded homes and encourage spread of the virus.

Landlords and property managers are frustrated: Some have been waiting months for federal aid that hasn’t arrived, and they don’t see how they can keep people who haven’t paid rent in their apartments any longer, O’Dea writes. “We’re going to have to start putting people out,” said Edward O’Daniel, a St. Louis property manager.

Go deeper: Read O’Dea’s [story at STLToday.](#)

Other worthy stories in the local press:

[St. Louis American:](#) Stefani Weeden-Smith leads an effort on the part of 11 St. Louis institutions that are pledging to hire more people of color from high poverty areas and to spend more with minority-owned business.

[St. Louis Public Radio:](#) St. Louis leaders join resident to oppose name of new Homer G. Phillips Hospital.

[KSDK:](#) Former Ladue officer who accidentally shot suspect talks about ‘nightmare’ incident, rare mediation

5. Ask Syl: Socialism or Capitalism for African-Americans?

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: “How do you consider Black capitalism vs. Black socialism?”

Syl Responds: Black capitalism vs Black socialism?” Why “versus?” Why not a hybrid of both philosophies with laser-like focus on fostering political, social, and economic power among black people nationwide? The only way for black people to rise above racism, poverty, and reach some semblance of “progress,” is through economic independence. In short, until we control our own educational, economic, and social systems, we will always be victims to the whims of white people and white power.

Go deeper: [Syl’s thoughts](#) on Black empowerment.

Send your questions: to Sylvester at sylvesterbj@gmail.com and we promise a thoughtful response that will be shared with the community.

- **Bonus:** If your question is chosen you’ll receive a \$25 gift card to Northwest Coffee.

Contributors to this newsletter. [Sylvester Brown](#) (top left) columnist, and [Erika Whitfield](#), (top right) and [Dick Weiss](#), operations. Click on a name to get a bio.

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