



STL Equity Matters

Welcome to the 19th edition of our newsletter: STL Equity Matters ...

How it works: We shine a light on how race, ethnicity, and gender are lived in our region.

Who is behind this: This newsletter is brought to you by the [River City Journalism Fund](#), a nonprofit journalism project formerly known as Before Ferguson Beyond Ferguson. This rebranding and new collaboration bring additional resources and brainpower that will boost reporting on local government, the environment, criminal justice, the arts, the business community, and more.



RIVER CITY
JOURNALISM
FUND

rcjf.org

Local journalism is in crisis. Continuing fallout from the pandemic, the ongoing erosion of print revenue and corporate hedge-fund ownership threaten local newsrooms.

We believe there is a solution.

You can learn more by reading this story in the [Gateway Journalism Review](#).

If you'd like to support RCJF, use this button:

Donate

Let's dive in ...



Kim Gardner. (Photo by Danny Wicentowski) and Blake Strode of Arch City Defenders.



1. What Does It Mean to Be a Progressive in St. Louis?

What's new: The uproar over Kim Gardner's conduct as St. Louis circuit attorney has driven a wedge between local progressives. A former ally, Mayor Tishaura Jones, has said Gardner has ["lost the trust of the people."](#)

Blake Strode, a civil-rights attorney and executive director of [Arch City Defenders](#), says with so many progressives now holding office and the prospect of even more joining them after the city elections today and next month, "now is the time to decide how to spend that moment in the sun. Either we are going to spend that time looking over our shoulders, placating 'moderate detractors' ... or we we are going to embody the courage and boldness to that brought us to this political moment."

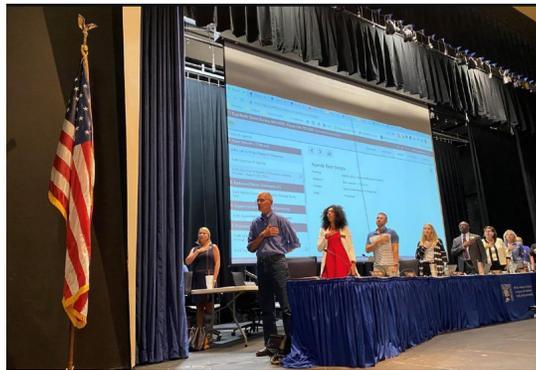
Scapegoated: Strode maintains Gardner has been scapegoated for the horrific traffic accident involving a high-school volleyball player whose legs were amputated in the aftermath.

"A wave of ire and criticism was directed at one person: Circuit Attorney Kim Gardner. Why? Because she had failed to bring about the incarceration of this 21-year-old menace before he could drive erratically and cause the awful accident. Calls for Gardner to step down ... came from all directions, including a powerful chorus of prominent progressive lawmakers. All united in sound and fury: The city's prosecutor was to blame."

Long-term consequences: Strode argues that the matter should have been contextualized. Long-term structural solutions should be considered that could prevent future injuries.

Go deeper:

- Read Strode's commentary in the [Riverfront Times](#).
- Gardner's staff down by nearly half as caseloads jump. [St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#)
- Poll shows low approval ratings for Jones and Gardner. [St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#)



The Rockwood School Board meeting last September at Marquette High School. (St. Louis Post-Dispatch photo by Blythe Bernhard)

2. Former Rockwood Administrator Sues the District

What's new: The Rockwood School District faces more blowback as it deals with increasing polarization among parents, teachers, and board members.

Race-based harassment: The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reports Brittany Hogan, who resigned from the district in April 2021, is seeking damages from the district, arguing that its conduct violated state laws against race-based harassment, discrimination, and retaliation. Hogan served as the district's director of educational equity and diversity. Her suit said officials failed to respond to harassment against her until white employees also asked for help.

"Rockwood continued to stay silent about Ms. Hogan's targeted mistreatment. Rockwood punished Ms. Hogan for her complaints by ignoring her and subsequently excluding her from important meetings where her input would previously have been important, stripping her of her job responsibilities, and constructively discharging her."

Rockwood administrators declined comment:

By the numbers: Rockwood is the third- largest district in Missouri, with approximately 20,000 students, and covers a large portion of western St. Louis County.

Go deeper: Read Bryce Gray's report in the [St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#).



Visitors take in Pillars of the Valley. (Post-Dispatch photo by Christian Gooden.)

3. Soccer Fans Will Confront the Past

What's new: With all the excitement surrounding the future of St. Louis' expansion entry in Major League Soccer, fans will come face-to-face with a feature of the city's past, meant to be troubling and inspiring. It's called "Pillars of the Valley," an art installation recalling the Mill Creek Valley neighborhood. It's made up of eight granite pillars that evoke hourglasses and stands just outside CityPark stadium in the neighborhood now known as Downtown West.

Why there? Why now? "This is something you have to confront as you're coming up the street," says the creator, Damon Davis.

The Mill Creek Valley was home to as many as 20,000 Blacks for decades until the late 1950s. Civic leaders had the residences, churches, and businesses razed to make room for redevelopment.

"I want people there to know that you're in somebody's house and you should show respect. For the stadium to get there, those people had to get out."

Joining hands: St. Louis City SC welcomed the installation and shared a moving [video](#) documenting the neighborhood's past. Vivian Gibson, author of the ["Last Children of Mill Creek,"](#) spoke at a dedication ceremony Feb. 16.

Go deeper:

- Read reporter Valerie Schremp Hahn's story about "Pillars of the Valley" in the [St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#).
- Clayton Community Foundation commemorates [Crispus Attucks School](#) with historic marker.



A view of the Mill Creek Valley neighborhood.

Now a Word from our Sponsor

LaVidaCo is proud to support
Before Ferguson Beyond Ferguson!



[Click on the image to visit LaVidaCo.](#)



A Jesuit mission's ledger, circa 1836, showing payments made by Matilda Tyler to purchase her freedom (Photo by Christian Gooden/Post-Dispatch)

4. Jesuit Slaveholding Effort Involving SLU Put on Back Burner

What's new: The Jesuit Roman Catholic religious order said it was committed to unearthing the history of its involvement with slaveholding, including in St. Louis. But now the research here has been quietly downsized, Jesse Bogan reports in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

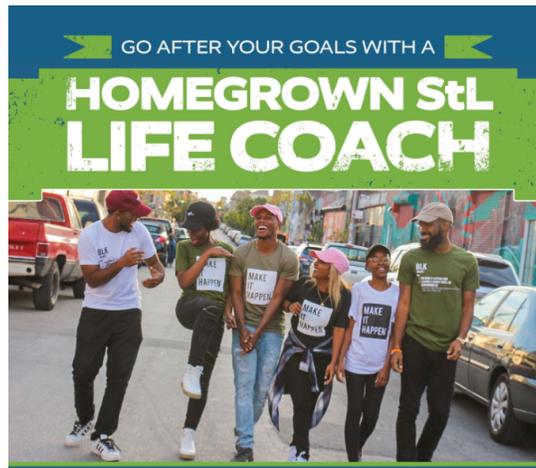
"I am alone now," the Rev. Jeffrey Harrison, coordinator of the Slavery History, Memory, and Reconciliation Project, told Bogan. "I do what I can. I am trying to keep the lights on."

The work so far: The project started in 2016. A half-dozen staff members verified the names of 74 people enslaved by the Jesuits between 1823 and 1865.

Reorganizing, not quitting: A spokesperson for the Jesuits says the St. Louis effort is being folded into a nationwide effort to eliminate overlap.

Fundraising lags: The Jesuits vowed to raise \$100 million for the Descendants Truth and Reconciliation Project with a long-term goal of raising \$1 billion to invest in education for descendants of slaves, support indigent senior citizens, and provide resources to address race-based problems. But the foundation hasn't surpassed an initial \$15 million from the Jesuits.

Go deeper: Read Bogan's report in the [St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#).



5. Life Coaches Called on to Help Black Boys

What's new: A program involving life coaches working with students and their families in St. Louis city and county is expected to start in April.

Why it matters: An African-American male in his 20s and living in St. Louis earns on average \$15,000 annually compared to \$30,000 for a white man of the same age. The new program growing out of Washington University's Brown School aims to reduce the disparity. It's called [HomeGrown STL](#).

How it will work: A [regional steering committee](#) comprising local community leaders experienced in such fields as career development, banking and finance, health, housing, law, and safety is involved. The program has enough financial support to hire life coaches for 395 boys, with one life coach assigned to about 20 members and working year-round. [Dr. Sean Joe](#) is founder and principal director for HomeGrown.

Go Deeper: Read Debra Chandler Landis' story in [St. Louis Magazine](#).



Please donate: This newsletter and our journalism supporting social justice depends on support from readers like you. [Click here to donate](#).

Please share: Forward this newsletter to your friends. Send them [here](#) to become a subscriber.

Email not displaying correctly?

[View it in your browser](#)

[Unsubscribe](#)
