



STL Equity Matters

Welcome to the 28th edition of our newsletter: STL Equity Matters ...

How It Works: We shine a light on how race, ethnicity, religion, 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.



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Let's dive in ...



Paul Aguirre performs in the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis production of "A Christmas Carol"
Photo by Jon Gitchoff

1. Have Diversity Efforts Put the Rep in Dire Straits?

What's New: The cancellation of some shows at the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis and a "Hail Mary" December event to save the season have many wondering what went wrong at the venerated institution. Some suggest one of the issues was the Rep's push to diversify audiences, Rosalind Early reports in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

Why It Matters: The Rep is a keystone institution in St. Louis and has long enjoyed a national reputation due in large part to the late artistic director Steve Woolf.

Search for Answers: To be sure, almost every live-theater venue in the nation encountered setbacks because of the pandemic. And many audiences were slow to return. But Early notes that ticket sales suffered when a new artistic director, Hana S. Sharif, mounted edgier productions aimed at attracting more diverse audiences. Sharif has since departed.

"People started leaving at intermission," said Charles M. Lock, a Webster Groves resident and longtime Rep subscriber. "It was almost a traffic jam at intermission. So we decided that we would stop going, and then we decided last year that we would go back again, but it was the same thing."

Moving Forward: The Rep hopes to have a new artistic director on board by next month. "Whoever the future artistic director is, they will have to walk a fine line between keeping subscribers happy and bringing in new audiences — all while keeping an eye on costs," Early notes.

Go Deeper: Read Rosalind Early's story in the [St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#).



Kyndall Bovinett, a senior at Francis Howell North, addresses her classmates during a walkout on Jan. 18. Photo by David Carson, Post-Dispatch

2. Student Walkout Supports Black History/Lit Classes

What's New: Hundreds of high-school students in the Francis Howell School District walked out of classes on Jan. 18 to protest the school board's intervention into curriculum matters concerning Black history and literature.

Why It Matters: After recent elections, the school board has grown increasingly conservative and more ideological. Some members are aligned with a national effort aimed at dialing back or removing the teaching of Black history. They claim too much attention is paid to the nation's sins of the past and courses are making white students bear an undeserved burden of guilt.

Blowback: The board's actions drew a reaction nationwide, and members are feeling the heat. The board had voted 5-2 in December to eliminate the Black History and Black Literature curriculum. But a week later, board president Adam Bertrand said the courses would continue to be offered if the curriculum can be changed to make the courses "politically neutral."

Student Outrage: Both Black and white students participated in the walkout. They pointed out the courses were electives so no one was being forced to take the classes.

“It really opened me to being a critical thinker, being able to think for myself and formulate opinions for myself,” Lauren Chance, a Black senior at Francis Howell North High School, told St. Louis Public Radio. “I feel that that class has really boosted my confidence into becoming the person I am today.”

Said Zoe Abraham, a white student: “None of this was covered in any of my other history classes. There is strength and power in this history. There is an importance and a lesson to it that we don’t get to cover in our required classes.”

Go Deeper:

- Read and listen to interviews with Francis Howell students at [St. Louis Public Radio](#).
- Read about the school board's recent actions in the [St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#).



Yakir Hexter (right) and his friend David Schwartz. Both were killed in action Jan. 8. (Courtesy Photo)

3.The War in Gaza Comes to University City

What's New: In a poignant and profound column, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch's Bill McClellan tells the story of longtime social-justice warrior Chris Hexter and his family. Hexter lost his grandson Yakir

Hexter, a member of the Israeli Defense Force, in the fighting in Gaza.

Why It Matters: Chris Hexter, the eldest son of Jack Hexter, a history professor who taught at Washington University, began marching for civil rights as a young adult. In the summer of 1963, he participated in the sit-in at the Jefferson Bank. When he was a freshman at the University of Wisconsin, he went to Mississippi for “Freedom Summer” in 1964.

Family Legacy: Hexter's father was Jewish but not observant. Chris followed his dad's philosophy of living a moral life without religion. His son Joshua went on to become an observant Orthodox Jew and moved to Israel, where he and his wife raised Yakir and two other sons. Yakir's reserve unit was activated after the terrorist attacks of Oct. 7, and both he and a good friend David Schwartz were killed Jan. 8 in Gaza. They were both 26.

Crosscurrents: McClellan writes:

Chris "is not a supporter of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. He still believes in a two-state solution. He understands the criticism leveled at Israeli policy in Gaza.

"Of course, there was a need to respond, but the rule of proportionality makes sense to me," he said.

"But to him, this is not about political alliances or even morality. It is about loss."

Go Deeper: Read McClellan's column in the [St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#).



Dr. Antoinette "Bonnie" Candia-Bailey

4. A Suicide at Troubled Lincoln University

What's New: Antoinette Candia-Bailey, Lincoln University's former vice president for student affairs, committed suicide on Jan. 8. Reports suggested that university President John B. Moseley had bullied and mistreated Candia-Bailey. Moseley fired Candia-Bailey on Jan. 3, less than a year after she was hired.

Why It Matters: "Candia-Bailey's death is another blow to Lincoln University, which has struggled with funding shortfalls and declining enrollment," according to Holly Edgell, managing editor of the [Midwest Newsroom](#), a public-radio collaboration among NPR member stations in Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, and Nebraska. In 2023, federal officials estimated Missouri had underfunded Lincoln by almost \$361.6 million over the past 30 years.

A Cry for Help: Candia-Bailey had asked for support from the university's Board of Curators, according to reports. She shared her depression and despair with friends and family.

Questions Concerning Moseley: Moseley has served as Lincoln University president since 2022. He is white but has served for 14 years on HBCU campuses. The university said Moseley has taken a paid administrative leave while the Board of Curators has a third-party expert conduct a review.

Go Deeper: Read Edgell's story at [St. Louis Public Radio](#).

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5. How Black Migration Sparked Generation Nope

What's New: In a series of essays for Washington University's Common Reader, [Lyndsey Ellis](#) examines why Black families are leaving the city of St. Louis. Lyndsey's work is supported by the Heartland Journalism Fellowship, which was established by the River City Journalism Fund and Washington University to support development of aspiring minority and underrepresented writers.

Why It Matters: The city, for all its problems, is a historic home for African Americans and an incubator for their brilliance. Think Tina Turner, Grace Bumbry, Arthur Ashe, Annie Malone, Dick Gregory, and Chuck Berry, to name just a few. St. Louis is known for the Dred Scott decision, but Ellis' research turned up a little-known fact that there were more free Blacks in St. Louis in 1860 than slaves.

By the Numbers: As of July 2022, Blacks totaled 128,387, or 44.8 percent, of St. Louis' population, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, Ellis noted. In 2019, the number of Black St. Louisans numbered 136,167, or 45.3 percent, of the city's population.

Fleeing or Forced Out?: Ellis cites five reasons Black families are leaving the city: security, generational differences, forced migration, housing discrimination, and class politics.

Go Deeper: Read Ellis' essays:

- [Anywhere but here](#)
- [How Black migration sparked generation nope](#)
- [Five Reasons Blacks Are Leaving St. Louis](#)



That's Eva Borwardt, who spent part of her childhood in St. Louis, pictured in the New York Times Magazine.

6. NYT Shines a Light on St. Louis As It Covers Israel-Hamas

What's New: It's always interesting when the New York Times finds something newsworthy in St. Louis. In this case, it's a story about Jewish support for the Palestinian cause.



Robert Powell at the St. Louis Artists' Guild in Clayton, where he has mounted a new exhibition of African-American art. (Screen capture from HEC video)

7. An Exhibition Devoted to African-American Art

What's New: *All Colors*, an exhibition masterminded by civic leader and artist Robert Powell, returns to the St. Louis Artists' Guild. This year's iteration showcases more than 80 works by invited African-American artists from across the country.

Why It Matters: Powell is founder of Portfolio Gallery & Education Center, which has partnered with the Guild to host this

Why It Matters: Progressive Jews are split over how to address Palestinian aspirations in the wake of the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel.

Rabbi and Congregant: As a teenager, Eva Borwardt attended services at Central Reform Congregation, which was under the leadership of its founding rabbi, Susan Talve. Borwardt has since taken up the cause of Palestinians and is a national spokeswoman for an organization supporting Palestinian liberation.

Talve is concerned about such groups because, as she told reporter Daniel Bergner, she saw "no nuance in the pro-Palestinian position."

"I care deeply about the injustice that been done to the Palestinians, but it's not either-or."

Go Deeper: Read Bergner's story in the [New York Times Magazine](#).

exhibition every other year. Along with mounting exhibitions, Portfolio over the last 35 years has:

- Provided art education to children, adults, and developmentally disabled persons.
- Worked with educators to enhance traditional arts in the school setting.
- Offered lectures, demonstrations, and opportunities for cultural and intellectual exchange.

Visit the Exhibition: *All Colors* will remain on view at the Guild, 12 North Jackson Ave., Clayton, through Feb. 17. To learn more, visit these websites: [St. Louis Artists' Guild](#) and [Portfolio Gallery](#).



One of the works from the exhibition.



8. Champion for Equity Coming to WashU

What's New: Kicking off Black History Month, author Heather McGhee is coming to the Washington University campus.

Why It Matters: McGhee has crafted legislation, testified before Congress, and helped shape presidential campaign platforms. Her book *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together* spent 10 weeks on the New York Times bestseller list and was long-listed for the National Book Award.

[The Center for the Study of Race, Ethnicity & Equity](#) is hosting McGhee as its 2024 Distinguished Visiting Scholar.

Notable: McGhee's Chapter 2 revisits Fairgrounds Park in North St. Louis, where a riot was sparked after Black St. Louis residents attempted to swim at a newly desegregated pool.

Where and When:

- Graham Chapel on the Washington University campus
- 6 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 1



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