



Still Fighting

By Margarette Joyner

Sitelines BLM
Cadence Theatre Company
Richmond, VA

Dramaturgical Packet Created by Liv Wilson
In Collaboration with Omiyemi (Artisia) Green
March 2021

Table of Contents

Playwright, Margarette Joyner

The Heritage Ensemble Theatre and Joyner's Tradition of Work

Links to Musical and Visual Inspiration

The VA War Memorial

History and Architecture

The Vietnam War

Black Troops Overseas

Timeline of the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement

Additional Information/References

The BLM Movement

National

Richmond

Parallels Across Time

Police Brutality Then and Now

Additional Resources

Audience Facilitation Questions

Summary:

After centuries of resistance through slave revolts, the Civil Rights Movement, and waves of Black Lives Matter, the question remains: Have we really made any progress? *Still Fighting* seeks to stretch across generations to answer this question. In her piece, playwright Margarette Joyner speaks to the frustrations and fatigue of young, Black individuals as they continue the struggle to end racial injustice in this country. The work also connects to past generations to acknowledge the sacrifices made by ancestors to ensure that the fight can continue today. Within the site-specific context of the Virginia War Memorial, *Still Fighting* explores the parallels between the Black Lives Matter Movement and previous conflicts, both racially and politically driven, on the backdrop of a space of memory. By portraying the personal experience of those fighting to peacefully exist, this work amplifies the BLM Movement and engages the stories that Richmond locations are now telling.

About the Playwright, Margarett Joyner

Margarett Joyner is the Founder and serves as the Executive Director of The Heritage Ensemble Theatre Company in Richmond, Virginia. The company's mission seeks "to preserve African American stories through performance, to inspire and create dialogue which results in recognition, acknowledgement, and healing." The Heritage Ensemble Theatre has produced several of Joyner's pieces that contribute to their mission.



Joyner's tradition of work gives voice to the voiceless and often uncovers buried African American histories. Joyner describes her work as "giving voice to ancestors." With the ever-present ancestral connection, Joyner seeks permission before the release of their collective stories. *Sweet Chocolate and the Seven Christians* written in 2016, adapts the well-known story of "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" into a child-friendly musical following the story of Sweet Chocolate, in collaboration with Virginia Union University. The 2019 production of the one woman show, *Message From a Slave*, tells the story of a woman's transition from freedom into slavery. The second act features her daughter speaking from the heart and challenges the audiences' perceptions and growth. Most recently, at Richmond Triangle Players, Joyner's work *What They Did For Us* acknowledges and highlights four African American women who have paved the way for those who have come after. The play follows the lives of Phillis Wheatley, Wilma Rudolph, Cathay Williams and Queen Nzinga and all they had to overcome in order to move from tragedy to triumph. Finally, in the near future, Joyner's piece *Her Silence Speaks Volumes* will open, exploring the realities of women in real life situations through a collaborative cast in complete silence.

In addition to playwriting, Joyner also puts her talents to work as a Director, Singer, Costume Designer, Set Designer, Collage Artist and Jewelry maker. She has directed *Ceremonies in Dark Old Man*, *Steal Away*, *For Black Boys Who Have Considered*

Homicide When the Streets Were Too Much at The Heritage Ensemble Theatre Company. With a Master's Degree in Theatre from VCU, Joyner worked as the only full time Instructor of Theatre at Virginia Union University for six years. Currently, she is a full time Certified Actor Interpreter at Colonial Williamsburg.¹

As a Marine Corp veteran, Joyner was drawn to sites of memory whilst considering and uncovering the dual meaning of fight, both physically and of protest. In a conversation with her daughter, Joyner recognized the frustration and exhaustion of young people around her. The question "What is the point of continuing the fight if no progress is being made?" arose and *Still Fighting* arose with it.

During the height of the BLM Movement in the summer of 2020, Joyner felt as though history was repeating itself. She had fought the fight again and again and it was a new generation's turn to hit the streets. The televised nature of the protests made the struggle so present, so blatant and yet. The constant denial of the right to existence leads protestors to question: "Have we really made any progress?" *Still Fighting* seeks to stretch across generations to answer this question.

The Virginia War Memorial

In 1950, the Virginia General Assembly authorized the development of a memorial to honor the 10,000 Virginian lives lost in the Second World War whilst serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. The Memorial was dedicated in 1956, including the addition of Virginians who made the ultimate sacrifice in the Korean War. The design of the Shrine of Memory was inspired by Grecian temples combined with mid-century modernity. The open pavilion overlooks downtown Richmond, framed by glass sheets on which names of the fallen are engraved. At the center of the Shrine of Memory stands a 22-foot-tall statue of a woman grieving called "Memory", with the eternal flame at her feet.

¹ "PAST PRODUCTIONS." *The Heritage Ensemble Theatre Company*, 2021.



Since its dedication, the Memorial has moved to include those killed in action in Korea, Vietnam, and Gulf Wars, as well as America’s 21st century conflicts. Close to 12,000 fallen Virginians are now honored at the Shrine of Memory. The Virginia War Memorial has evolved from a space of solely remembrance to one of education. The grounds now include a museum, art gallery, studio to record veterans’ stories, archives and collections, and an outdoor amphitheater.²

The mission of the Virginia War Memorial is “to honor veterans, preserve history, educate youth, and inspire patriotism”. The preservation of veterans’ stories provide context for the shrine, helping future generations understand the sacrifices made by those who came before them. The Memorial strives to advance “knowledge of history and cultural awareness throughout the Commonwealth and beyond by sharing and preserving veterans’ personal stories and America’s military past”.³

The Vietnam War

The first major conflict coming off of the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War marked the first war in which troops were not formally segregated. Regardless, de facto segregation and discrimination still occurred. Black Americans were more likely to be drafted than white Americans and more likely to be assigned specifically to combat units. A

² *History and Architecture*. 2021, vawarmemorial.org/about/history-and-architecture/.

³ *Mission & Vision*. 2021, vawarmemorial.org/about/mission-vision/.

total of 300,000 African Americans served in the Vietnam War. Project 100,000, instituted by Secretary of Defense Robert Mcnamara in 1966, strived to pull more men and inner city youth into the war as a means of climbing out of poverty and



coming out the other side more productive members of society. Roughly half of the men in this program were Black.⁴ The project was later criticized for funneling these men directly into combat positions in Vietnam.⁵

It should be noted that there were interracial friendships between soldiers who fought side by side. In comparison to the domestic situation, there was a significant amount of connection across racial identities. Away from the context of resentment in the United States, some soldiers were able to find lifelong friendship. However, the system of racial hierarchy was still alive and well, even abroad.⁶ The assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. was a major factor in the increase of racial tension and violence. Racism on various American bases in Vietnam became much more prevalent. Reports of troops wearing KKK robes, cross burning, and flying the Confederate flag in response to the civil rights leader's death came from several camps. The Confederate flag became commonplace, painted on jeeps, tanks, and helicopters, discouraging Black troops from taking pride in their identity.

Black soldiers were able to find solidarity with each other through identity submovements. From 1967-1970, a group called the "Bloods" distinguished themselves with black accessories such as gloves and bracelets as well as learning complicated dap

⁴ Chow, Andrew R., and Josiah Bates. "Black Vietnam Veterans on Injustices They Faced: Da 5 Bloods." *Time*.

⁵ Turner, Cory. "Project 100,000 (1966-1971)." *Black Past*, Black Past, 27 Nov. 2019.

⁶ Goodwin, Gerald F. "Black and White in Vietnam." *The New York Times*.

handshakes. Black troops used the daps, as well as the Black Power salute, to acknowledge each other in this predominantly white space.

Discrimination also took the form of denial of promotions. African American soldiers would train new, white soldiers who would soon be promoted above their Black mentors.⁷ In 1968, Black prisoners overwhelmed the guards at Long Binh Jail, capturing the commander and setting two buildings on fire. Riots in service clubs and dining halls occurred on an almost daily basis. Wallace Terry, a journalist from *Time* who spent several years in Vietnam with the troops, stated in 1969 that “another war was being fought in Vietnam-- between Black and white Americans.”⁸ That same year, Terry conducted a survey: out of 400 Black soldiers 60% of them believed Black people should not fight in Vietnam because of the inequality in the United States.⁹

The refusal of Southern military leaders to address racial discrimination did not help the cause. They consistently failed to accept or act on complaints of discrimination from Black soldiers. When some leaders eventually suggested addressing the racial tension amongst troops, they were either ignored or fired.¹⁰ The discrimination followed Black troops after the war as well. Black soldiers saw a major disparity in bad-conduct and dishonorable discharges as compared to their white counterparts. They also had a much higher casualty rate, accounting for 7,243 deaths, 12.4% of total casualties.¹¹ Black veterans also did not have access to the same resources and support from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs. They suffered from untreated PTSD, were less likely to be employed full time, and were often denied disability claims.

The military has just recently begun to reckon with their discriminatory practices. In June of 2020, the Navy and Marine Corps finally banned the Confederate flag. The Pentagon also looked at changing the names of Army bases named after Confederate

⁷ “Military History of African Americans in the Vietnam War.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation.

⁸ Goodwin, Gerald F. “Black and White in Vietnam.” *The New York Times*.

⁹ Chow, Andrew R., and Josiah Bates. “Black Vietnam Veterans on Injustices They Faced: Da 5 Bloods.” *Time*.

¹⁰ Goodwin, Gerald F. “Black and White in Vietnam.” *The New York Times*.

¹¹ “Military History of African Americans in the Vietnam War.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation.

officers, but no change came to fruition.¹² Current practices in the military are still biased against people of color, with only two of its forty one highest ranking officers identifying as Black. In addition to a lack of representation and promotion through the ranks, the usage of racist slurs and symbols laced with prejudice and hate run rampant. For more information about current racial injustice in the military, see:

<https://www.pogo.org/analysis/2020/07/racism-in-the-ranks/>

Still Fighting offers the notion of fighting a “double war”, that African Americans in the 1960s were experiencing the war of their country and that of their people. Mr. Wright explains, “We were glad to fight overseas, so that they wouldn’t bring that mess over here and our families and friends didn’t have to be persecuted by 2 wars at the same time” (3). The international conflict of the Vietnam War and the simultaneous domestic Civil Rights Movement influenced each other as both events were affecting many of the same Americans.



¹² Chow, Andrew R., and Josiah Bates. “Black Vietnam Veterans on Injustices They Faced: Da 5 Bloods.” *Time*.

Timeline of the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement

May 7, 1954: Ho Chi Minh's forces defeat the French to end the First Indochina War.

May 17, 1954: *Brown v. Board of Education* effectively ends racial segregation in public schools, however many remain segregated.

July 1954: The Geneva Conference divides Vietnam into two zones.

August 28, 1955: Emmett Till is brutally murdered in Mississippi for allegedly flirting with a white woman. His murderers are acquitted, and the case brings international attention to the Civil Rights Movement after a magazine publishes a photo of Till's beaten body.

December 1, 1955: Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat, prompting a year-long Montgomery bus boycott.

September 4, 1957: Nine Black students known as the "Little Rock Nine" are blocked from integrating into Little Rock Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. President Dwight D. Eisenhower sends federal troops to escort the students, however, they continue to be harassed.

September 9, 1957: Eisenhower signs the Civil Rights Act of 1957 into law. The law allows federal prosecution of those who suppress another's right to vote.

February 1, 1960: The Greensboro Four refuse to leave a "whites only" lunch counter. The Greensboro Sit-In sparks similar nonviolent sit-ins throughout the city and in other states.

December 20, 1960: National Liberation Front (Viet Cong) established in South Vietnam.

1961: The freedom riders travel through the American South to protest segregated bus terminals and restrooms. The Freedom Rides were marked by horrific violence from white protestors, drawing international attention to the movement.

August 28, 1963: Approximately 250,000 people take part in The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Martin Luther King gives his "I Have A Dream" speech.

July 2, 1964: President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law, preventing employment discrimination due to race, color, sex, religion or national origin.

August 2-4, 1964: Gulf of Tonkin incident. President Johnson seeks congressional approval for United States involvement in Vietnam.

February 21, 1965: Black religious leader Malcolm X is assassinated during a rally.

March 7, 1965: Bloody Sunday. Around 600 civil rights marchers walk from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama in protest of Black voter suppression. They are met by local police who block and brutally attack them.

March 8, 1965: First United States Marines land in Da Nang, Vietnam.

August 6, 1965: President Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to prevent the use of literacy tests as a voting requirement.

November 14-18, 1965: The Battle of Ia Drang, the first large-scale battle between the United States and the North Vietnamese Army. Both sides claim victory.

January 21-July 9, 1968: Battle of Khe Sanh.

April 4, 1968: Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee.

April 11, 1968: President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1968, also known as the Fair Housing Act, providing equal housing opportunity regardless of race, religion or national origin.

January 31, 1968: The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong launch the surprise Tet Offensive, attacking provincial capitals and other urban centers throughout South Vietnam.

January 27, 1973: Cease-fire reached between North Vietnam and the United States. POWs begin to return home.

March 29, 1973: The last US combat troops leave South Vietnam.

April 30, 1975: Fall of Saigon.¹³

Additional Resources:

[Virginia War Memorial website](#)

[Profile of a Soldier](#) (Educational video about the life of Gordon Young who died in Vietnam)

[Salute to Service - US Marine Corps](#) (Panel interview of three veterans, rec. in Nov 2020)

¹³ "Vietnam War Resource Packet." *VA War Memorial*, 2020.

[Vietnam War Resource Packet](#) (Contains key terms, maps, and a timeline)

The Black Lives Matter Movement

Beginning as a hashtag, the Black Lives Matter Movement was founded in 2013 by three Black organizers, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, in response to the acquittal of Treyvon Martin’ murderer. The BLM Movement works to “eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes,” while centering immediate improvements in the lives of Black individuals.¹⁴ The movement grew after the deaths of Michael Brown in Missouri and Eric Garner in New York. Most recently, a second wave of the movement gained international attention after the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, MN in May of 2020 was met with a series of protests in cities around the country and world.

In Richmond, Virginia, protestors took to the streets (and traffic circles) calling for an end to police brutality and racial injustice. Unrest beginning in May of 2020, both peaceful and violent, shook the city as thousands of people gathered. Peaceful protests were overshadowed by news coverage of the looting of businesses and the setting of fire to buses, dumpsters, buildings. A most notable peaceful event was the gathering around the former Robert E. Lee Monument, now named Marcus-David Peters Circle (after Marcus-David Peters, a Black man killed by police in Richmond). Previous calls to remove the monument in 2017 never came to fruition, however 2020’s protests led to the defacement of the cement; colorful graffiti in support of the Black Lives Matter Movement. The traffic circle became a place of empowerment, to portray images of racial justice on the backdrop of a reclaimed space. The defaced monument has been called one of America’s most influential pieces of protest art since the Second World War.¹⁵ In June, Governor Ralph Northam announced the monument would finally be taken down, however this process has been met with its



¹⁴ “Black Lives Matter - About.” *Black Lives Matter*, Black Lives Matter, 16 Oct. 2020.

¹⁵ “Robert E. Lee Monument (Richmond, Virginia).” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation.

own pushback from those who believe removal of a Confederate monument to be erased.¹⁶

In many ways, BLM mirrors the Civil Rights Movement of the 50s and 60s. Ideologically, people are still protesting the same things and rioting for the same reasons. In the mid-century, protest took the form of sit-ins, boycotts, freedom rides, and marches. They were battling a much more explicit form of racism, discrimination that was both written in law and enacted in practice. Main areas of change were in regards to segregation (in housing, transportation, schools, and countless other public spaces) as well as police brutality, employment, and poverty. BLM roots itself in the dismantling of oppressive forces, mainly in response to police brutality towards African Americans. In both periods of unrest, overt military and police action was taken against Black bodies. Both movements included the murder of young Black men and the acquittal of their murderers. Both centered around citizens taking to the streets to peacefully protest against the injustices done to them. The frustrating feeling of fighting the same fight over and over again is clearly valid and just.



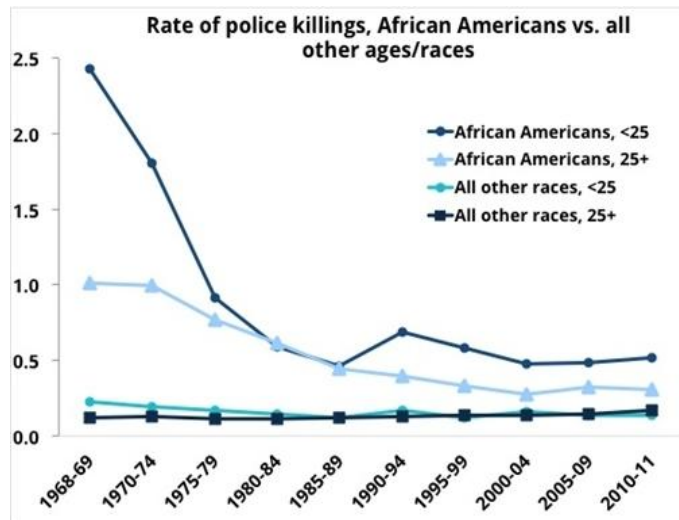
The differences between the two movements lie mostly in the passage of time and less in the concrete needs of the oppressed. The BLM Movement (especially in the

¹⁶ Manzanares, Keyris, and Jackie DeFusco. "Northam Says the Robert E. Lee Statue Will Be Removed as Soon as Possible." *8News*.

summer of 2020) was highly televised and took on an extremely public manner as the world sat at home, they had time to pay attention to the fight. The prevalence of video recording of cellphones and on the ground news coverage allows for a presentation of the facts right to the viewer, obviously marked by bias yet still more objective than an individual account. BLM has no obvious charismatic leader besides the three founders who seem to favor collective leadership. Perhaps this is also as a result of the use of social media and hashtags to promote the movement and increase public awareness and engagement. Exchange of information happens so rapidly now (for better or worse) that it has and will continue to shape the way social movements are organized, run, and supported.

Police Brutality Then and Now

While data from the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice suggests that the rate of police killings of Black Americans has decreased by seventy percent since the 1960s, they are still at much higher risk (rates are 4.5X higher) than their white, Latinx, and Asian counterparts. As the graph indicates, African Americans under 25 are at the

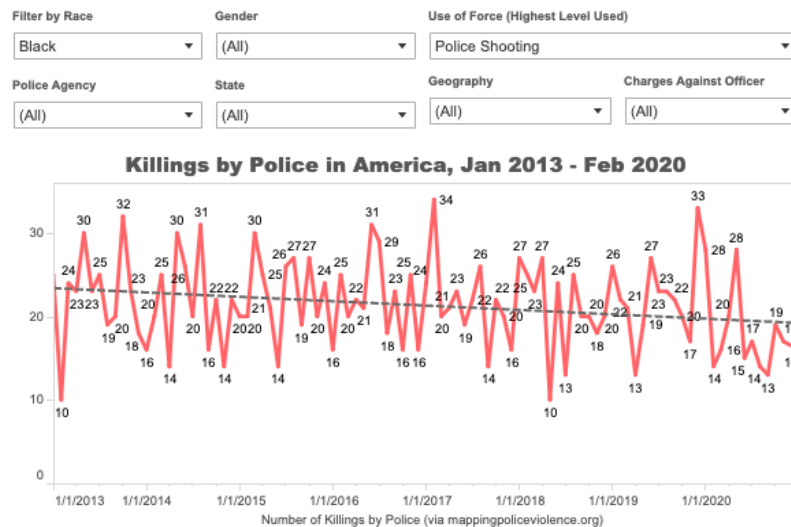


greatest risk of being killed at the hands of law enforcement. The decrease in police killings since the late 1960s means that instead of African American youth being victims in 1 out of 4 killings, the proportion as of 2014 is now 1 out of 10.¹⁷

In 2020, the police killed 1,127 people, around 27% of victims were Black and 35% were Black and unarmed. There were only 18 days in the entire year when the police did not kill someone. The graph below shows the Killings by Police in America between January of 2013 and February of 2020 (thus excluding the murder of George Floyd,

¹⁷ Mike Males Published: August 26, 2014. "Who Are Police Killing? - Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice." *Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice*.

Breonna Taylor, and others that sparked a resurgence of the Black Lives Matter Movement in the summer of 2020). The graph indicates the number of Black killings across America, specifically as a result of a police shooting.¹⁸



Additional Resources:

<https://library.law.howard.edu/civilrightshistory/BLM>

<https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/>

Questions for Audience Facilitation

- How did the location affect your perception of the piece? What does the site mean to you and how did it work to create connections from the past to present?
- What parallels do you see between the current BLM movement and social conflicts/movements of resistance of the past? How would you define resistance? (Can it take multiple forms?)
- How do you perceive the presence of Mrs. Wright in this piece?
- Do you believe true progress has been made since the 60s? How do you think racial oppression has changed and does it present or manifest itself differently today?

Musical and Visual Inspirations

Whilst developing the dramaturgical packet, the question of music for the film arose. No music was explicitly referenced in the script, however it seemed to have a sonic language of its own, particularly through the memories of Mr. Wright. Below are reference links to

¹⁸ *Mapping Police Violence*, Mapping Police Violence, 2020, mappingpoliceviolence.org/.

orchestral music that felt as though they fit the tone of the piece, a reminiscing and reflective feel.

Sanford Allen, Movement for String Trio

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aOKKRXupoKo>

Beethoven, Moonlight Sonata (on harp)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y2n-i9CXw1o>

V. Monti, Czardas (start at 0:30 seconds):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHO6KOPWXtc>

Vaughan Williams, The Lark Ascending

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZR2JIDnT2l8>

Slow, sad violin and cello:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WybeiUa_1Ck

Meditative with piano accompaniment:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8ZScAdV8qE&t=43s>

Bibliography:

"Black Lives Matter - About." *Black Lives Matter*, Black Lives Matter, 16 Oct. 2020, blacklivesmatter.com/about/.

"A Brief History of Civil Rights in the United States: The Black Lives Matter Movement." *HUSL Library*, Howard University, 2018, library.law.howard.edu/civilrightshistory/BLM.

Chow, Andrew R., and Josiah Bates. "Black Vietnam Veterans on Injustices They Faced: Da 5 Bloods." *Time*, Time, 12 June 2020, time.com/5852476/da-5-bloods-black-vietnam-veterans/.

Goodwin, Gerald F. "Black and White in Vietnam." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 18 July 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/07/18/opinion/racism-vietnam-war.html.

History and Architecture. 2021, vawarmemorial.org/about/history-and-architecture/.

Manzanares, Keyris, and Jackie DeFusco. "Northam Says the Robert E. Lee Statue Will Be Removed as Soon as Possible." *8News*, 8News, 5 June 2020, www.wric.com/news/local-news/richmond/northam-to-announce-removal-of-robert-e-lee-statue-from-richmonds-monument-avenue/.

Mapping Police Violence, Mapping Police Violence, 2020, mappingpoliceviolence.org/.

"Military History of African Americans in the Vietnam War." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 15 Mar. 2021, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_history_of_African_Americans_in_the_Vietnam_War.

Mike Males Published: August 26, 2014. "Who Are Police Killing? - Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice." *Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice*, Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, 2014, www.cjcj.org/news/8113.

Mission & Vision. 2021, vawarmemorial.org/about/mission-vision/.

"PAST PRODUCTIONS." *The Heritage Ensemble Theatre Company*, 2021, www.theheritageensemble.org/gallery.

"Robert E. Lee Monument (Richmond, Virginia)." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 30 Mar. 2021, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_E._Lee_Monument_\(Richmond,_Virginia\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_E._Lee_Monument_(Richmond,_Virginia)).

Turner, Cory. "Project 100,000 (1966-1971)." *Black Past*, Black Past, 27 Nov. 2019, www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/project-100-000-1966-1971/.

"Vietnam War Resource Packet." *VA War Memorial*, 2020, vawarmemorial.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/VWM_Vietnam-War-Resource-Packet.pdf.

Image Citations:

Alexyn Photo & Video, (2021). Marcus David Peter's Circle [Digital image]. Retrieved 2021.

“Baker Black Veterans.” *The New Yorker*,
media.newyorker.com/photos/59097c1b1c7a8e33fb390330/16:9/w_1742,h_980,c_limit/Baker-Black-Veterans.jpg.

“Black and White in Vietnam.” *The New York Times*,
static01.nyt.com/images/2017/07/18/opinion/18goodwinSub/18goodwinSub-jumbo.jpg?quality=90&auto=webp.

“Black and White of Protests Against Racial Discrimination.” *Haiku Deck*,
img.haikudeck.com/mi/8a4b3391b211bebef629b8fa34c86d05.jpg.

“Black Lives Matter Protest.” *CNN*,
dynaimage.cdn.cnn.com/cnn/c_fill,g_auto,w_1200,h_675,ar_16:9/https%3A%2F%2Fcdn.cnn.com%2Fcdnnext%2Fdam%2Fassets%2F200622104651-black-lives-matter-support-impact-0613.jpg.

“Cadence Theatre Company Logo.” *Cadence Theatre Company*,
images.squarespace-cdn.com/content/5b4d519cf79392aa9bf1f38e/1576272225223-J6MM6L4ELDS633KIHFFO/cadence_logo.png?content-type=image%2Fpng.

“Defaced Lee Statue.” *Wikimedia*, Wikimedia,
upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/9/9b/Defaced-lee-statue-2020.jpg/220px-Defaced-lee-statue-2020.jpg.

“Margarette Joyner.” *LinkedIn*, www.linkedin.com/in/margarette-joyner-03895249/.