

Yesenia
Hernandez

In the 1850s, Arkansas was a frontier state in which the growth of slavery was directly linked to its expansion. By 1860, Arkansas was home to more than 110,000 enslaved people. Jonesboro, which was incorporated in 1859, was no exception to this.

In the early 1860's Craighead County citizens selected Lester Landing as the delegate to cast the county's vote in the State Convention, and "fearing that he might lose his slaves unless the Confederacy won its contention, he cast the county's vote in favor of seceding from the Union and uniting with the Confederacy." Our single vote to join the Confederacy was cast because a man was afraid of losing his power over enslaved black people.

Almost 20 years after the civil war, a white woman was supposedly murdered by 4 black men. And I quote from "A History of Craighead County Arkansas": "A justice of the peace found sufficient evidence to hold the negroes to the grand jury, but before the jury met to consider the evidence, enraged citizens of the settlement seized the negroes and hanged them near New Haven church.... This action had a decided effect in lessening the negro population of the county."

Our county has ~~we have~~ a history of lynchings.

Now, I don't know if those men killed Miss Mattie or not, but what I do know is that time after time our nation (our town not excluded) has had a vengeance in particular against black men accused of crimes before rightfully ever given the chance to a fair trial.

I decided to look into streets named after other people. Hattie Caraway was the first elected female senator of the United States Congress. She was breath of fresh air in the name of progress—that was unless you were black. She voted against anti-lynching, worrying it would "destroy the South".

Caraway. That's the street I live on.

As I read through the pages of our history, I came across many mentions of the Ku Klux Klan. One in particular stuck out to me, "As a leader of the Ku Klux Klan (referring to Attorney R. H. West, one of the early lawyers of Jonesboro) in this country during the reconstruction period, his life was sought and his home watched and raided many times. Mrs. West and Mrs. T. D. Culberhouse were sworn to secrecy and made all the costumes for the early Klan."

Culberhouse. Caraway.

Now, I'm not here to try to change all street names that are associated with racism.

But if we are going to glorify the names of people that were openly against equal rights, why can't we honor the name of a man who influenced history in itself for people of color. And I get it, we have an overpass named after him. From the time I read the sign letting me know the bypass is named after the Reverend, only ten seconds passed before I was off of it. Ten seconds.

I've heard: "why not name another street?" or "Wouldn't it be a slap in the face to Martin Luther King to be associated with a street in that side of town."

Fun history lesson, In the 1930s, as part of the New Deal, loan programs were created to help Americans finance their homes. With the combination of redlining and the federal government encouraging

developers to discriminate against non-white people, the results of these policies is that from 1934 through 1968, a whopping 98% of home loans were given to white families.

Our government has systematically oppressed people into living in certain areas of towns. Hence why the north side of the tracks has a disproportionate amount of people of color living in that area.

This is why this particular street is so important.

We still live in a time that in the studio I work at, Torrence Chunn who is a barber, tells every single young black man that sits in his chair, the extra procedures to take when a cop pulls them over. Not in fear of getting a ticket, but in a fear of not making it out of that interaction alive.

Jonesboro has ~~own~~ a rich history. History to be proud of. And history to learn from to help us become a better community for everyone. I keep hearing we shouldn't erase history. And that's not what we're doing. Your story isn't erased because your name isn't on a street sign.

Mr. Johnson's bloodline ended decades ago, but his story still lives on in books and in the hearts of the people that take the time to read his story.

But do you know who's stories we didn't bother saving? Ancestors of little black boys and girls whose lineage includes people subjected to being shipped in boxes, physically and emotionally abused, not to forget raped—as "breeding" was a common practice slave owners practiced. .

Can you imagine the impact of us creating history in this room for the better? To not forget our past, but instead to embrace the changes that have brought us closer as a community, sealing it in the history of our town for future generations to see—by honoring Civil Rights activist Martin Luther King, Jr.

Many people here support Team Jonesboro whose main objective is to improve the quality of life of our citizens.

Quality of life includes knowing your town (previously a home of enslaved people) not only accepts that you are an equal, but to see that ~~we~~ ^{ing your} are capable of honoring the person that helped us get there.

~~We're often afraid of change, but if it wasn't for change, what progress would be here today?~~

~~WHAT A ~~GOOD~~ BEAUTIFUL WAY FOR OUR CHILDREN, AND THOSE THAT WILL COME AFTER TO SEE THAT THE STRUGGLES OF THEIR ANCESTORS NOT ONLY ACKNOWLEDGED BUT ALSO HONORED BY MUK PROUDLY INSTALLED BY THEIR TOWN - IN THEIR COMMUNITIES~~