

These comments reflect my initial observations on a June 26, 2019, memorandum report written by Montgomery County Superintendent of Schools Jack R. Smith to the members of the Montgomery County Board of Education: "School Renaming Process (02-25-19-08)."

- Who were the "other historians identified by Mr. Joshua I. Civin?" (p. 1). It is unclear whether Montgomery History sought advice from professional historians in Montgomery County or whether it relied on its small in-house staff to provide information to MCPS. Furthermore, though two UMBC students are named (Mark Price and Devinie Lyle), it is unclear how they were chosen and what their fields of study are. Were additional historians consulted and not named?
- The "aggressive workplan" described in Smith's report doesn't appear to be supported by the results. Though the research into naming practices by other institutions is laudable, the local research appears to be superficial and incomplete. For example, the names recommended for school appear to have been drawn from a grab-bag of notable individuals with little effort made to identify significant Montgomery County residents. MCPS relied on the expertise of Montgomery History executive director Matt Logan to research "the historical perspectives of the 33 names of persons from Montgomery County on the list of suggested names and all existing schools that are named after individuals" (p. 2). Though Logan oversees an organization with a historical mission, he is not a professional historian and his organization has a demonstrated track record producing racially biased exhibits and publications that render Montgomery County's African American and civil rights history invisible.<sup>1</sup> Montgomery History's past work not only renders invisible the Black experience in Montgomery County, but it also reproduced a museums and historiography model found throughout the United States that tends to reduce and tokenize Black history to a few notable individuals (e.g., Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Josiah Henson) and themes (Underground Railroad, rural life, churches).<sup>2</sup>
- The detachment and lack of understanding of Montgomery County's Black history is reflected in the names of significant individuals in Montgomery County history that do not appear in the list of potential school names. For example:
  - **Romeo W. Horad Sr. (1895-1968)**. Horad was a DC native who married a woman whose family had lived in Montgomery County for more than a century. The Howard University Law School graduate worked in the DC Recorder of Deeds

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<sup>1</sup> David S. Rotenstein, "An Exhibit on 1950s Life Reproduces Segregation," *The Activist History Review* (blog), June 6, 2018, <https://activisthistory.com/2018/06/06/an-exhibit-on-1950s-life-reproduces-segregation/>.

<sup>2</sup> Doreen St Félix, "The Farce, and the Grandeur, of Black History Month Under Trump," February 2, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-farce-and-the-grandeur-of-black-history-month-under-trump>; Theodore Johnson, "America Is Losing the Real Meaning of Black History Month," *Time*, February 16, 2018, <http://time.com/5162808/black-history-month-purpose/>; Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York: Nation Books, 2016).

before establishing his own real estate practice (in 1938) dedicated to helping African Americans in the District buy homes in racially restricted subdivisions. That same year he bought a lot from his wife's family and built a home in Wheaton, where he lived until his death in 1968. While in Montgomery County Horad became an early civil rights leader. His accomplishments include founding the Citizens Council for Mutual Improvement. Their goals included improving the county's segregated school system (this was six years before *Brown v. Board of Education*), improving roads in African American communities, providing water and sewerage, and removing the Jim Crow signs in Montgomery County government offices. Their January 1948 appeal to the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners (the precursor to today's County Council) marked the start of a modern civil rights movement in Montgomery County. Horad also became the first African American to run for countywide political office after Montgomery County in 1948 adopted a new charter.

- **Elizabeth Lee Scull (1924-1981).** Montgomery County native Elizabeth Scull rejected her father (and family's) segregationism and became a champion for integrated and affordable housing, open accommodations, and other civil rights issues. She was instrumental in breaking down Montgomery County's Jim Crow barriers working with groups throughout the county to end poverty in such rural areas as Tobytown. After her husband's death in 1968, Scull was elected to the Montgomery County Council. Her 1981 *Washington Post* obituary described her as "County Council's liberal conscience" with a "reputation as a champion of low-income housing and controlled growth."<sup>3</sup>
- **David Scull (1917-1968).** After serving in the army during World War II, the Pennsylvania native entered real estate. He and his wife Elizabeth were a formidable team in regional civil rights issues. According to the University of Maryland Archives finding aid for the couple's papers, "After the failure of his congressional campaign, David and Elizabeth Scull increasingly devoted attention to social causes. Together they worked to secure decent housing for a small African-American enclave in Montgomery County, Tobytown, and organized Emergency Homes, Inc., to provide temporary housing for the needy. Still, Scull saw politics as the best method of achieving the changes he thought were necessary. He was elected to the Montgomery County Council in 1966." After his sudden death in January 1968, Washington mayor Walter Washington described Scull to a newspaper reporter as "one of the most responsible, energetic and progressive councilmen ... under his leadership ... the county council enacted strong ordinances dealing with equal housing, clean air, human relations

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<sup>3</sup> Kathryn Tolbert, "Montgomery's Elizabeth Lee Scull Dies," *Washington Post*, May 30, 1981, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1981/05/30/montgomerys-elizabeth-lee-sculd-dies/a6a318a5-b1f4-4ac7-8ef0-430ed9549cd1/>.

planning and zoning. He was an indefatigable supporter of civil right [sic.] and equal opportunities.”<sup>4</sup>

- **Lee Jordan (1909-1988).** Takoma Park resident Lee Jordan had moved to Montgomery County from Edwards, Mississippi. After playing baseball in the Negro League for the famed Homestead Grays, Jordan returned to Takoma Park and began working as a janitor in Silver Spring’s Blair High School. He also became active in the Parker Memorial Baptist Church on Geneva Avenue where he was a deacon for most of his life. Jordan is perhaps best remembered for his leadership role coaching and mentoring children in Takoma Park. Takoma Park recognized his contributions in 1981 by naming an athletic field in his honor. But Jordan was much more than a leader in his church and a respected athlete. He also was a civic leader and a strong voice for Takoma Park’s African American residents. In the early 1950s, the City of Takoma Park proposed to build a new municipal works facility in the heart of the city’s African American neighborhood — Jordan’s neighborhood. Jordan led the community’s efforts to rebuff the project that would have displaced residents, eliminated a popular recreational space in the segregated community, and created a nuisance literally in Black Takoma Park residents’ backyards. Jordan’s efforts spurred the city to revise its plans and to build a recreational center in Heffner Park that became a hub for African Americans living in lower Montgomery County who could not patronize movie theaters, restaurants, and armory concerts in the rigidly segregated county.<sup>5</sup>
- In addition to omitting Montgomery County resident who made significant contributions to civil rights history and to the county in general, the list of names identified as potential candidates for commemoration in school names reflects the superficial approach used by MCPS. For example,
  - The table appended to Smith’s memorandum identified Silver Spring resident Frank L. Hewitt as a potential candidate for school naming. The report identified Hewitt as an “industrious and gifted businessman” notable because he “Pushed for residence [sic.] locating in Silver Spring, finding places where people can live in the city. Along with E. Brooke Lee, important in the development of Silver Spring, MD’s modern residential infrastructure.” MCPS seems to have forgotten that this exercise in examining school names stems from research documenting E. Brooke Lee’s segregationist and white supremacist history.<sup>6</sup> It is inconceivable

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<sup>4</sup> Anne Christmas, “Scull’s Death at Peak of Career Shocks County,” *Washington Evening Star*, January 24, 1968; University of Maryland Libraries, “Finding Aid, David and Elizabeth Scull Papers” (College Park, Md.: University of Maryland, n.d.), <https://archives.lib.umd.edu/repositories/2/resources/1131>.

<sup>5</sup> Though Jordan’s contributions to athletics are well known and have been documented in published sources, his civil rights work and civic activism remains ripe for academic study.

<sup>6</sup> Bruce Richard Johansen, “Imagined Pasts, Imagined Futures: Race, Politics, Memory, and the Revitalization of Downtown Silver Spring, Maryland” (Dissertation, University of Maryland, 2005), <http://drum.lib.umd.edu/handle/1903/3210>; David Rotenstein, “There’s More to Fighting Racism than Getting Rid of a Confederate Monument,” *The Washington Post*; *Washington, D.C.*, March 5, 2017, sec. OUTLOOK; José Umaña, “Navarro Requests Name Change for Middle School,” February 14, 2019, <https://mont.thesentinel.com/2019/02/14/navarro-requests-name-change-for-middle-school/>.

that MCPS would recommend removing Lee's name from a school (E. Brooke Lee Middle School) and add the name of one of his partners (Hewitt) to another, especially considering the easily documented fact that Hewitt used the same racially restrictive deed covenants that Lee used to help ensure that Silver Spring remained a sundown suburb.

- The brief biography attached to Roscoe Nix greatly minimizes his role in Montgomery County's civil rights history and inaccurately summarizes his contributions locally and nationally. In 1962, Nix was a Department of Labor employee who along with another 200 African Americans were transferred to new office space in downtown Silver Spring. Shortly after the county enacted its open accommodations law (January 1962), Nix attempted to eat at a Silver Spring restaurant and was asked to leave. His intervention led to several years of civil rights actions in downtown Silver Spring that included sit-ins and litigation. After leaving the Labor Department, Nix went to work for the U.S. Department of Justice to work on civil rights issues throughout the United States. One biographical sketch published after Nix's death described him as one of the "major architects of the modern Montgomery County."<sup>7</sup> The MCPS summary of Nix's career incorrectly states: "Nix and his family moved to Montgomery County in 1968, but it was not until he ran successfully for the county school board in 1974 that he became involved in local affairs">
- The biography for Montgomery Blair (Montgomery Blair High School namesake) fails to mention that he was an unapologetic white supremacist. Though a Lincoln cabinet member and slavery opponent, Blair nonetheless believed that people of African descent should be "colonized" elsewhere outside of the United States to such places as the African continent, the Caribbean, and South America. Recent research has shown that Blair was the only one of Lincoln's cabinet to oppose the Emancipation Proclamation and that he opposed many of the abolitionist initiatives spearheaded by Frederick Douglass and his contemporaries.<sup>8</sup>

These are some of the most evident issues I was able to identify in the MCPS report. I would recommend that MCPS revisit this exercise by identifying credible and qualified historians and individuals with experience in developing collaborative approaches to truth and reconciliation with regard to racism. I also would recommend that MCPS identify knowledgeable community historians and scholars within Montgomery County to conduct more comprehensive and defensible research into individuals for whom existing schools are named and for whom future schools may be named.

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<sup>7</sup> Johansen, "Imagined Pasts, Imagined Futures: Race, Politics, Memory, and the Revitalization of Downtown Silver Spring, Maryland"; "Roscoe R. Nix Biography. Roscoe R. Nix Distinguished Community Leadership Award," Montgomery County Volunteer Center, n.d., <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/volunteercenter/awards/RoscoeNixBio.html>.

<sup>8</sup> David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom*, First Simon & Schuster hardcover edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018); Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).