

**SPEECH BY LARRY ROEDER, MS**  
**SATURDAY, 7/18/2015 LEESBURG COURTHOUSE**  
**REMEMBERING JIM CROW AND THOSE WHO RESISTED**

- Good morning everyone. Isn't this a great day to be in Loudoun County? I love living here.
- If your ancestors were enslaved or you just want to know MORE about that period, visit the building to my far right, the archives of the Loudoun County Circuit Court. There you will find original documents that registered the enslaved as freed.
- Down Market Street is the Balch library, the center for historical learning in Loudoun. There you will find the Black History Committee, which is part of the Friends of the Balch Library; but also many experts on all aspects of our county's history.
- I mention those buildings because to understand history you must study, and like many of you, I began my journey to understand racism in a different land. So study has been my solution to understanding.
- **Study was also a primary theme** to all African-Americans after the Civil war. They went to schools in droves because study would help them set aside the mistaken belief that African-Americans were inferior, an image perpetuated by Jim Crow minstrel shows.
- Unfortunately, laws held African-Americans back; we know them as Jim Crow legislation, which grew out of a mix of paternalism and hatred.
- Well, the formerly enslaved were determined that their children control their own lives, understand the words on a contract so as not to be ripped off, and prosper in their fresh new world of uncertain freedom.
- **Imagine**, the poverty of former slaves, often working for pennies as subsistence farmers or servants, even field hands where South Riding and other wealthy communities now sit. Still, they used their meager income to build schools and pay teachers. It's one of the great civil rights stories of Loudoun County and the south.
- Many helped them, including Black and White teachers like the Quaker Caroline Thomas who instructed in Leesburg and Lincoln.

- A student of Thomas in June, 1867 was 16 year old Edwin Washington, who worked in a nearby Hotel. His pay was five dollars a month, plus board, with the “privilege of coming to school” in between errands; which meant he couldn’t attend regularly, or at all during Court weeks. **Still**, he went to class whenever he could. We need to remember the Edwin’s of that time for their bravery and tenacity to learn.
- Edwin wrote the following, which pretty well speaks for all his generation. The title was “*Going to School*”

**“I think it is a very good thing to go to school and learn to read and write. It is the first opportunity we ever had, and we ought to make good use of it. I think it will be a great improvement to us. We ought to love our teacher, and mind her and respect her; and if we love her she will love us, and we ought to love and respect everybody.”**  
**Signed Edwin Washington.”**

- Going to school was tough in a farming community for any child, more so for African-Americans . ***Let’s all have a round of applause for Edwin!***
- Recently, there has been much discussion over the naming of our own schools. Some complained that a school might be named after a former politician who died in the 1930’s and who might have authored Jim Crow laws. I have no evidence yet that he actually did.
- Instead, in 1924, Mr. Ryan, then retired, tried to help the Conklin “colored school,” stay open. They called them that in those days. Ryan seems to have been decent, honorable and an effective legislator, but definitely a segregationist..
- We need to recognize his personal qualities; but let’s also remember that Mr. Ryan chose to be an ambitious politician in a party espousing racism, and eventually rose to be Speaker of the House of Delegates. There was a different choice, even then, the choice of inclusion.
- Frankly, it’s impossible to imagine that politicians of Ryan’s party could rise so high without believing in Jim Crow. Of course this is just an opinion. Those folks are not around to defend themselves.

- But let's not forget that the same party changed the State Constitution in 1902 to explicitly exclude blacks from political life. In other words, even though the enslaved were set free, they and their progeny would no longer be allowed to vote, their schooling would be limited and their economic opportunities diminished. This was true Jim Crow.
- Then came March, 1924 when the Virginia House of Delegates passed The Racial Integrity Laws, including an act to sterilize undesirables in State institutions. As the Washington Post recently reported, those laws devastated both Native and African-Americans.
- Those terrible Jim Crowism's also became a model for race laws used by the Nazis in the 1930's in Germany.
- If the study of history we have been talking about means anything, we must understand the wrongness of Jim Crow and lament that more people of substance and power in our State didn't have the moral rectitude to stop it in its tracks.  
**Therefore, I say it is high time we memorialized those who resisted slavery and Jim Crow. Don't let them be forgotten. Both struggles are important.**
- This brings us to a complaint by some who say today that if being a segregationist was a stain, we must also consider the reputation of George Washington or Thomas Jefferson to be stained, since they actually enslaved people.
- **Let's be honest.** America's greatest tragedy is that its founding giants proclaimed that all men were created equal and entitled to liberty; yet women, the poor and the enslaved had few, if any rights.
- All true and it must be lamented; but it also misses the main point.
- Those same giants also risked their lives to establish a working mechanism to bring the ideal to fruition over time. We have Washington, Jefferson and so many other imperfect early Giants to thank for that and for our freedom.
- **Jim Crow segregationists were the opposite.** They rejected the verdict of the Civil War and tried to form a different mechanism, one designed to destroy or damage a recently freed people.
- The forefathers were imperfect; but they moved America forward. Jim Crow intentionally took us back to a darker age. It was the wrong choice.

- **I would suggest to you today that Jim Crow** is an even darker stain than the slavery inherited by the forefathers. That's because at the end of America's greatest crisis, Jim Crow resulted from a conscious choice by free men of power to re-enslave African-Americans into poverty and political isolation.
- **Today**, America is much more tolerant and diverse; but prejudice is still alive. Just remember Charleston.
- Well, to ensure that future generations fully enjoy the fruits of our Revolution, we must not forget the Jim Crow era, in order that we may effectively resist such efforts in the future.
- **We must also honor those who resisted slavery and Jim Crow.** Their story is as important as the one portrayed by the statue at the gate.
- President Obama recently said, we can honor the men who fought for their cause without honoring the cause itself, with which we disagree.
- This is why in keeping with Lincoln's desire to see both Confederates and union supporters as Americans, I am not calling to tear down the Confederate statue. We are one nation. I agree with Lincoln.
- **So what will we do?** Let's build a new monument with private money at the gate in front of me to recognize those who struggled for the union and against slavery and Jim Crow, black and white soldiers, civilians and the enslaved, and of course Edwin Washington.
- **We suggest this idea**, not to bury the Confederate statue, but rather to consecrate a joint struggle that continues today, to build a nation of the free, where all can speak their minds without fear of assault and live in equality.
- Thank you very much.