



a podcast by the Southern Poverty Law Center

## Not Okay Final Script PART TWO

**Zi Booska:** ‘Don’t touch the mascot, stop at the Black Lives Matter flag,’ and once he said that he walked away.

**Jamila Paksima:** What was one of the first racist symbols that you saw in this school?

**Ng’oma Lungu:** The mascot.

**Curtiss Reed:** When you choose a mascot you really need to do your due diligence around your community and what the mascot is projecting to the rest of the world.

**We Demand Change March, June, 13, 2006:** *What do we want?*

*Justice!*

*When do we want it?*

*Now!*

*Not one more life!*

*Not one more life!*

**Jamila Paksima:** *Sounds Like Hate* is a new podcast series from the Southern Poverty Law Center. I’m Jamila Paksima.

**Geraldine Moriba:** And I’m Geraldine Moriba. This first season is about how some people become radicalized and how some disengage from a life of hatred.

**Jamila Paksima:** In the second episode of *Not Okay*, we return to Randolph Union High School in Vermont where 95 percent of the community is white and students and faculty are caught in the crosshairs of racism. We find out if the Black Lives Matter flag will be raised at the high school and learn how extremist symbols hide in plain sight. At the center of the controversy is a massive mascot in the gym at Randolph Union. Some say it has a disturbing resemblance to a hooded Klu Klux Klansman charging on a horse.

**Geraldine Moriba:** *“I see a couple of churches, a train station.”*

**Geraldine Moriba:** Jamila and I were walking through the center of the town when a historical society display caught our attention. It says in 1777 Vermont became the first state in the nation to abolish slavery. Four years later, the town of Randolph was established.

**Jamila Paksima:** The population is about 5,000. Less than 200 are people of color. Today, the streets are quiet, and have been for months. And schools? They’re closed.

*Anthony Fauci: We are dealing with clearly an emerging infectious disease that has now reached outbreak proportions and, likely, pandemic proportions...*

**Jamila Paksima: With the crisis of COVID-19.**

*“Get off of him, now. We’ve got mace”*

**Jamila Paksima: Then the video recordings capturing the death of George Floyd.**

*George Floyd: “Please, the knee on my neck. I can’t breathe!”*

**Jamila Paksima: A black man killed by police brutality.**

*Vladimir Duthiers: “In Minneapolis, where, as you know, chaos and anger have erupted across the country over the death of George Floyd”*

**Jamila Paksima: Nationwide demonstrations began. Now students and former alumni of Randolph Union High School are defying state orders against large gatherings and planning the town’s first racial justice march.**

**Brittney Malik:** We’re passing the Randolph Police Department on our way on our march...

**Jamila Paksima: Brittney Malik is one of the lead organizers of the “We Demand Change” protest.**

**Brittney Malik:** We are simply just marching, just walking on the sidewalks through Randolph and just letting our voices be heard. That’s all we’re doing.

**Jamila Paksima: She’s also a former student at Randolph Union High School.**

**Brittney Malik:** We are not advertising any form of civil disobedience. That is why we are training de-escalators, in particular, is to alleviate those kinds of situations so we can just keep this about what the message is.

**Jamila Paksima: Brittney and the other student organizers plan to march from the school to a park, where they will give speeches, hold a moment of silence for victims of racism.**

*[Brittney Malik, Janea Hudson, and friends singing]*

*“I’ve been walking...”*

**Jamila Paksima: And sing.**

*“...with my face turned to the sun....”*

**Jamila Paksima: Brittney and co-organizer Janea Hudson are practicing one of the songs they intend to use to rally the marchers.**

**Brittney Malik:** The song is called *Stand Up*. It’s by Cynthia Irivero from the movie motion picture *Harriet*.

**Jamila Paksima:** The lyrics tell the story of Harriet Tubman, an abolitionist who guided slaves north to freedom. The message is to strive for liberty and keep on going even if you have to do it alone.

*“Early in the morning before the sun begins to shine...”*

**Brittney Malik:** The song is just about her standing up and making a way for them to go.

*“And I’ll fight with the strength that I got until I die. So, I’m gonna stand up, take my people with me...”*

**Jamila Paksima:** In 2015, when Brittney was still a student at Randolph Union, she was the only black person in her grade.

**Brittney Malik:** It was mind boggling, to say the least.

**Jamila Paksima:** One day, the racist connotations of the school’s mascot, the “Gallopig Ghost,” became all too real.

**Brittney Malik:** I was, like, struck silent. I can’t see anyone else who’s feeling like me: Fear, isolation, confusion.

**Jamila Paksima:** This moment forever left a mark, when suddenly more than 24 athletic team captains charged into the gym.

**Brittney Malik:** They are galloping in on broomsticks and they’re all, all of them are wearing white sheets over their heads. What is happening? Like, does nobody else see this horde of white-sheeted people running into this room? Like, is no one else freaking out right now?

**Jamila Paksima:** With so few students of color at the high school, racism tends to show up as normalized expressions, like the stampede Brittney experienced. Other times as deliberate hate.

**Aamir:** I would get left out a lot and there are some harmful words that were said to me. So, I told my mom and then she taught me what the words meant and some people have different views on people who are different colors.

**Jamila Paksima:** What is your background?

**Aamir:** I’m part Indian.

**Jamila Paksima:** East Indian, to be specific. Aamir, who is in the ninth grade, will make a sign, wear a mask, and attend the “We Demand Change” protest with Brittney. He says he experiences racial attacks routinely at school.

**Aamir:** There’s a lot. I don’t know if I can even keep track.

**Jamila Paksima:** What’s a lot?

**Aamir:** Like, more than five. And each different year it’s happened.

**Jamila Paksima:** When you go to school, do you think school is a safe or a frightening place?

**Aamir:** It depends on what happens in the day.

**School Secretary:** *“And your name. Sign in guys, sign in...”*

**Jamila Paksima:** **On our first trip to Vermont in February of 2020, before the pandemic, we arrive at Randolph Union High School.**

**School Secretary:** *“Good morning!”*

**Jamila Paksima:** **Almost everything seems familiar. The morning begins with a few late stragglers rolling into the school office.**

**Elijah Hawkes:** My name is Elijah Hawkes and I’m principal here at Randolph Union. We can see the high school gym ahead of us...

**Jamila Paksima:** **Principal Elijah Hawkes led us towards the gymnasium.**

**Elijah Hawkes:** This where we have our volleyball games, basketball games, gym classes...

**Jamila Paksima:** **We’ve come to see the mural of the mascot.**

**Elijah Hawkes:** We have the mural of the mascot on the wall that’s 15-feet-by-20-feet. That’s been the source of much conversation in the school in the last few years. We have a cloaked rider on a horse, both of them white and grey. The horse is charging forcefully, almost looks like charging forcefully into the gym. The rider looks ghostly, ghoulish, mystical, mythical.

**Zi Booska:** So, the mascot issue was also brought up in the beginning of my 12th-grade year when the class, the racial justice class started...

**Jamila Paksima:** **Zi Booska, a senior at the time, says his racial justice class was deeply concerned about the message the mascot was projecting. But they were *already* overwhelmed trying to raise the Black Lives Matter flag.**

**Zi Booska:** We knew whatever we chose would be a whole year commitment and the conversation was brought up about the mascot when we were deciding on what we’re going to focus on. We eventually chose the Black Lives Matter flag, um...

**Jamila Paksima:** **Zi knew both issues were inflammatory. Almost immediately he received a warning from a parent at the end of a school soccer match.**

**Zi Booska:** We watched out the game and the game ended, and we started to walk away, and one of the parents that was watching the game came up to me and said, ‘Don’t continue your work you’re doing. Don’t touch the mascot and, like, stop at the Black Lives Matter’. And then he walked away. I didn’t even get a word out. I never experienced anything like that from a parent in the community.

**Jamila Paksima:** Did it feel intimidating?

**Zi Booska:** It for sure was intimidating.

**Jamila Paksima:** **That didn’t stop Zi. He reported the threat to Principal Hawkes and the teachers in the**

**racial justice class. He and his classmates continued their work to raise the Black Lives Matter flag.**

**Elijah Hawkes:** So, after a full semester of that kind of teaching through advisories they came and presented at a faculty meeting...

**Jamila Paksima:** Despite community resistance, they gained support from some students, faculty, and parents.

**Elijah Hawkes:** And then I said, 'After you've done a good deal of dialog and movement building here at the school, then let me hear your rationale,' and they did that.

**Jamila Paksima:** By January of 2019, Principal Hawkes made his decision.

**Zi Booska:** "This is a call for racial justice and a call to reckon with our country's troubled past..."

**Jamila Paksima:** At an assembly to commemorate Martin Luther King Day, six students took center stage. They explained the meaning of the Black Lives Matter flag and how it represented their own experiences.

**Student #1:** "We all have personally seen or heard racism or racial slurs"

**Jamila Paksima:** A teacher recorded the presentation.

**Student #2:** "A majority of the school does not identify as minority..."

**Jamila Paksima:** Zi remembers how enormous this accomplishment was.

**Zi Booska:** It was, like, a moment for us to finally be, like, 'Well, like, our work actually got some; like, it paid off.'

**Student #2:** The words we are about to share are disgusting and represent the hate people in our school experience every day.

**Student #3:** C\*\*\*\*

**Student:** Illegal.

**Student #4:** C\*\*\*[bleep]

**Student #3:** How did you make it over the wall?

**Student #3:** These words and comments have meant to divide us, hurt, and tear each other down.

**Zi Booska:** During my speech, the parent who came up to me and told me to stop doing the things I was doing was standing there watching us give the presentation. So, it was kind of like a big relief factor, being like, 'I showed you'.

**Student #1:** The only way we can progress as humanity is working together as one on our problems in society so one day we can all strive for equality.

**Group:** Thank you.

*[Applause]*

**Jamila Paksima:** When the applause ended, Principal Hawkes announced the Black Lives Matter flag would not only be raised, it would be flown all year round.

**Layne Millington:** I'm happy it went up...

**Jamila Paksima:** After the Black Lives Matter flag was raised, school superintendent Layne Millington worried his community still wasn't ready to tackle the "Gallop Ghost" mascot.

**Layne Millington:** The hope for what it could have achieved had those conversations actually been real conversations and not push people further into their own camps. I feel that that was a loss.

**Cadin:** I wasn't very happy about it.

**Jamila Paksima:** Cadin and Grace.

**Grace:** I was a little frustrated.

**Jamila Paksima:** Two eighth graders were in the assembly that day.

**Cadin:** I was pretty ticked off.

**Grace:** I almost felt, I don't want to say, left out as a white person, but I feel like we kind of, like, are taking it really far.

**Cadin:** I would have wanted it to say 'All Lives Matter' and not just 'Black Lives Matter'.

**Grace:** We're making little things into really big deals.

**If they're gonna make a big deal about the flag and all of that, I think they need to change the mascot.**

**Layne Millington:** I potentially have a fire here that can devolve into violence. Do I really want to be throwing more rocket fuel on it at this point in time?

**Tev Kelman:** I would say that every year since I've been here, some folks have remarked on how similar it looks to a KKK rider.

**Jamila Paksima:** Tev Kelman teaches history at the school.

**Tev Kelman:** Our mascot is the "Gallop Ghost" and has been, to my understanding, since the 1940s or 1950s and...

**Jamila Paksima:** The "Gallop Ghost" mascot has had dozens of versions, but it hasn't changed since 1988 when Kelman started teaching there.

**Tev Kelman:** It was coined by a sportswriter, a native son of Randolph named Aldo Merusi.

**Jamila Paksima:** It's on the face of nearly every wall clock in every classroom; there's no missing it. It grabs your attention.

**Tev Kelman:** He was referring to the fact that they're wearing white uniforms and they're galloping down the court so fast. So, that was the sort of origin story of this mascot.

**Curtiss Reed:** Someone in Burlington or Montpelier had mentioned to me, 'Oh! Have you seen the mascot at the high school, in Randolph?' I said, 'No, I hadn't'.

**Jamila Paksima:** Curtiss Reed is the executive director of the Vermont Partnership for Fairness and Diversity.

**Curtiss Reed:** It took an entire wall. It was a large mural.

**Jamila Paksima:** He received complaints about Randolph Union's mascot and fired off an email to Principal Hawkes.

**Curtiss Reed:** This looks like it came right out of Klan history.

**Elijah Hawkes:** Curtiss was the first to juxtapose for me that an image from the film *The Birth of a Nation* of a hooded rider on a hooded horse.

**Jamila Paksima:** *The Birth of a Nation* is a notorious and disturbing racist film made in 1915 by D.W. Griffith. It's a three-hour, black-and-white silent film set during the Civil War and Reconstruction. It features white actors in black face violently playing out awful stereotypes. The film chronicles a twisted story about how blacks stole an election and all the seats in Congress and how Southern Klansmen save the day. Geraldine, have you seen this film?

**Geraldine Moriba:** Unfortunately, I have. This film is Confederate-soaked propaganda celebrating slavery. It's a part of the distorted pseudo-historical "lost cause" narrative of the Confederacy. In scene-after-scene, hooded men in white robes gallop and kill almost every black person by gunshot.

**Curtiss Reed:** What's problematic is the imagery that shows the "Gallop Ghost". And that imagery is so closely linked to the Klan as to be so disconcerting to me.

**Jamila Paksima:** At the opening of the 2018 school year, during another assembly, Principal Hawkes did something unexpected.

He projected a massive image of a hooded Klu Klux Klan knight from *The Birth of a Nation* film poster right next to the mural of the "Gallop Ghost".

**Elijah Hawkes:** I felt an obligation to continue that conversation with people in our school and to do it when I had the mic.

**Zi Booska:** I think it was a big eye opener...

**Jamila Paksima:** Zi recalls that day.

**Zi Booska:** It was, like, very, very similar; the same exact pose and everything of a ghost, like, a capped figure riding on a horse, a white horse.

**Elijah Hawkes:** Some people were very taken aback; um, seeing the images was shocking for some people.

**Jamila Paksima:** His message was simple: It was time to stop holding onto this tradition and acknowledge the mascot's racist associations. Not everyone thought it was a good idea.

**Elijah Hawkes:** People who thought that it was a terrible way to start a school year and an inappropriate way to start a school year, and unprofessional, and some people very strongly thought I should resign or be fired.

**Jamila Paksima:** As the debates about the Black Lives Matter flag and mascot increased, so did the number of incidents with hateful messages, symbols, and racial slurs around the school.

**Elijah Hawkes:** We had an assembly. One of our community members, a local pastor in town, was sharing his remarks and touched upon the Holocaust. And one of our teachers observed one of our students making the upside down okay symbol at the time that the pastor was saying those remarks.

**Cory Collins:** When I was in school, we played this game where, you know, the "OK" symbol below your waist. If somebody looks at it, you punch him in the arm.

**Jamila Paksima:** Cory Collins is a senior writer at Teaching Tolerance with the Southern Poverty Law Center. He says the upside down okay sign now stands as a symbol of "white power."

**Cory Collins:** The "OK" symbol begins as essentially a troll.

So, someone on one of these chat boards, you know, is like, 'What if we make this into a white power symbol? We claim that this is a white power symbol and we see if the media picks it up?' The line between this being a joke and this being a serious nod to white supremacy or to white nationalism becomes very blurred. It becomes hard to say that it's just a joke.

**Jamila Paksima:** Principal Hawkes turned to Cynthia Miller-Idriss for advice.

**Cynthia Miller-Idriss:** "You know, um..."

**Jamila Paksima:** She's the director of the Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab at American University.

**Cynthia Miller-Idriss:** Times change and awareness of what symbols mean and you can do some educational work with the community and help them understand why this is an offensive symbol.

**Jamila Paksima:** Miller-Idriss has spent years studying how schools in Germany tackled their racist history and the rising tide of neo-Nazi messages and symbols.

**Cynthia Miller-Idriss:** It doesn't usually work very effectively to just ban or shut down those symbols without a kind of pedagogical conversation with students.

I think it's important for educational environments, for school environments, for communities to understand that they can be effective for everybody else.

**Elijah Hawkes:** Germany is doing things better than we are here in terms of engaging educators in the conversation about young people and the risks of them being radicalized.



**Jamila Paksima: Principal Hawkes's goal is to have every student at Randolph Union participate in small-circle advisory lessons on hate symbols, the way they did in Germany.**

**Cynthia Miller-Idriss:** What happened in Germany is, obviously, you have the history of the Holocaust, but then you had this very strong sort of second wave of extremism emerge in the 1980s and '90s among young people. The government reacted with really comprehensive engagement to prevent and interrupt radicalization pathways. So they have in every level of schooling trainings for teachers, workshops, retreats, the equivalent of what we would think of as mental health hotline or sexual assault hotlines, they have those kinds of resources across the society. So they do draw a line in the sand. They tell a community what its values are, what we stand for, what we won't tolerate.

**Grace:** I'm just playing a game with my friends and that's all I see it as.

**Jamila Paksima: Grace, an eighth grader, quickly became frustrated by the advisory lesson.**

**Grace:** If other people see it as me being racist, that's not how I'm putting it out to be. I'm just playing a game with my friends.

**Jamila Paksima: Cory Collins says this is exactly the point - manipulating common symbols.**

**Cory Collins:** These symbols certainly are not going away at all.

So, at Teaching Tolerance we keep track of hate incidents across the country. We are still seeing actually an increase in the amount of swastikas carved into desks or carved into bathroom stalls. It illustrates that they're open, which tells me that they could be sent down that wormhole of online radicalization. We know the internet can send them to really dark places.

So, I think, yeah, you have to be hyper vigilant.

**Jamila Paksima: Just tell us your name, where we are in the school, and what your role is.**

**Eileen Snow:** My name is Eileen Snow. We are currently in the media center at the high school and I am the assistant librarian.

**Jamila Paksima: Snow is proud to be a member of the "Ghost Nation". She grew up in Randolph, went to school here, and has collected eight decades of yearbooks.**

**Eileen Snow:** This one here is just scary.

**Jamila Paksima: She showed us different iterations of the "Galloping Ghost".**

**Eileen Snow:** This one's '95. This one's 1981.

**Jamila Paksima:** All of which she says are innocent.

**Eileen Snow:** And this one here, it's more of a skeleton with a cape.

**Jamila Paksima:** Would that be a hood or a cape?

**Eileen Snow:** To me it's a cape.

**Jamila Paksima:** Does it look like a ghost?

**Eileen Snow:** No, it looks like Skeletor wearing a cape [chuckle] and the horse looks more real.

**Tev Kelman:** The Klan had a strong presence in Vermont in the 1920s and into the 1930s...

**Jamila Paksima:** History teacher Kelman also met with us in the library to talk about the prevalence of the KKK in the 1920s.-

**Tev Kelman:** Something like four million members of the Ku Klux Klan nationwide at that time period and there was a chapter in Central Vermont of which Randolph is a part.

**Jamila Paksima:** Records show there were 30 active Klan members in the Randolph chapter in 1916 and a total of 2,000 Vermont Klan members who held picnics and cross burnings between the 1920s and 1940s. While there is no definitive link between the KKK and the original image of the school mascot, teacher Kelman has his own theory about why it was never challenged.

**Tev Kelman:** In time and space of an active Klan membership in the 1920s to this mascot in the 1940s helps, at least for me, to explain why it was not seen as problematic. There were probably people who had family members who are Klan members.

**Jamila Paksima:** Back then, the primary KKK targets were Catholic immigrants.

*Narrator:* 1924 and the Ku Klux Klan experiencing a nationwide revival begins a membership drive in Vermont.

**Jamila Paksima:** This is an oral history recording captured by the Vermont Historical Museum.

*Maudin Neill:* For 10 dollars they could become a member. They burned a lot of crosses. The people who were in it said it was fun to have a burning cross and everybody gather under it and sing. Sometimes they were burned to scare people just for sensationalism, I suppose.

**Eileen Snow:** We had a student here who started the petition of the students to get it changed.

**Jamila Paksima:** Snow, the assistant librarian, says a 10th grader turned to her for help.

**Eileen Snow:** He was very, um, offended by it.

**Jamila Paksima:** This student said the mascot compounded the weight of verbal taunting and racist slurs used against him. At a school where they had a shooting scare, he feared for his own safety and other students.

**Eileen Snow:** And he wanted to go and literally paint the gym wall himself. And I talked him from doing vandalism down to doing the proper channels. So, he started a petition and he got several kids to sign it...

**Geraldine Moriba:** Jamila, how successful was this petition?

**Jamila Paksima:** This student would not speak to us on the record, but he did confirm collecting 250 signatures from students and faculty.

**Eileen Snow:** I don't know where that petition lies now.

**Jamila Paksima:** In January of 2020, the student left Randolph Union and enrolled in another school.

**Elijah Hawkes:** I think part of why he left was he's a student of color and he wanted to be in a district where there were more students of color where he already had friends who are students of color.

**Geraldine Moriba:** So, are there other schools in the U.S. with mascots resembling the KKK?

**Jamila Paksima:** In fact, Geraldine, yes. I found two other schools that share the offensive imagery of the "Galloping Ghost".

**Eric Ward:** Why would you hurt children?

**Jamila Paksima:** That's Eric Ward, a senior fellow at the Southern Poverty Law Center and the executive director of Western States Center.

**Eric Ward:** It's not how we strengthen our ties to one another.

**Jamila Paksima:** He works nationwide to foster inclusive democracy in all areas of life, work, and schools.

**Eric Ward:** Us pretending that a man wearing a white sheet on a horse riding through the night doesn't parallel racist imagery, doesn't it frighten children or make them feel uncomfortable, isn't how we strengthen community.

**Jamila Paksima:** Randolph Union is just one of many schools in the U.S. with racist mascots. Kaukauna High School in Wisconsin is in discussions about their "Galloping Ghost" mascot and statue outside their school, and students at Abington High School in Pennsylvania started a Change.org petition to remove their "Galloping Ghost" mascot, and the school district has plans for their equity committee to address the issue. Eric Ward says there's a price for resisting change.

**Eric Ward:** It is a way of sowing division because you think you want to get one over, you know, on the liberals in society, but all you're really doing is hurting children who are your neighbors.

**Tev Kelman:** I don't think that it's a racist symbol...

**Jamila Paksima:** History teacher Kelman is also the vice president of the local faculty union.

**Tev Kelman:** I believe the origin story. The vast majority of the people who are feel very attached to it, I don't think that those people have racial animus or racist feeling behind that. But I do think that the impact has been extremely harmful to kids of color and that's why it needs to go...

**Jamila Paksima:** Kelman initiated a letter from the faculty, firmly demanding the removal of the "Galloping Ghost" mascot.

**Tev Kelman:** The view that folks who signed the letter shared is that there are issues which merit and deserve and are appropriate for a public discussion with all stakeholders. This is not one of those issues because the issue of student safety cannot be weighed against other people's preferences.

**Dana Decker:** Ten, 11 years ago I walked in and I was, like, 'That's an interesting mascot'.

**Jamila Paksima:** Teacher Dana Decker co-leads the racial justice class at Randolph Union.

**Dana Decker:** We're not gonna allow the kids to take on all of the hard work and the hate. It's up to us to start the conversation.

**Eileen Snow:** I read the email...

**Jamila Paksima:** Librarian Snow, who supported the student petition, bucked at the request to sign the letter from the faculty.

**Eileen Snow:** I'm, like, not signing. I live in this community. I'm gonna stay Switzerland, neutral. My son was a "Gallopig Ghost". I was one. My parents were. It's a ghost.

**Tev Kelman:** The vast majority of people do not see anything wrong with that symbol. But I also understand that the vast majority of those people are white people who may not have the life experience or the family history to appreciate how damaging that symbol can be.

**Jamila Paksima:** Out of 46 faculty members, 23 signed the letter.

**Dana Decker:** We, the undersigned faculty and staff of Randolph Union High School...

**Jamila Paksima:** Decker read an excerpt for us.

**Dana Decker:** ...respectfully but firmly demand the removal of the "Gallopig Ghost" mural. We call for a new school mascot that in no way connotes racist or white supremacist imagery.

**Jamila Paksima:** But before the teachers could present it to the school's superintendent, Layne Millington, and Principal Hawkes, their letter was leaked.

**Dana Decker:** There's now hundreds of messages of, like, a real-life witch hunt.

**Tev Kelman:** I wasn't anticipating that we were going to be posted on Facebook.

**Jamila Paksima:** The following comments are real posts read by actors.

**Bill Beal:** *I really hate you for actually doing your jobs. Good thing you guys are focused on social activism and creating monsters where there are none.*

**Krista Freeman:** *You're allowing a kid to call us racist. Get a backbone, y'all!*

**Jason Knapp:** *This is race-baiting; the mascot looks like a ghost on a galloping horse. I thought this was history!*

**Jamila Paksima:** Within hours, school Superintendent Layne Millington heard about the Facebook flurry.

**Layne Millington:** I don't want to denigrate the teachers at all because I firmly am in agreement with their feelings on the matter. The piece that I could have helped them with significantly was the recognition that we have some dug-in camps in this town, that if you are not extremely careful about how this unfolds they are going to dig in even harder. They're going to get angrier and there may be violence.

**Dana Decker:** This battle is hard *[crying]*. It's not like we want to start a fight in this community.

We just want everyone to feel safe and these students that come in here and are constantly called the 'N-word' and are constantly ridiculed and made fun of and called animal names and treated as slaves is not okay.

**Layne Millington:** Rather than tear this community apart, I'm going to cut to the end and make a decision.

**Jamila Paksima:** The next day, Superintendent Millington responded with his own letter to the community.

**Layne Millington:** The image of the "Gallop Ghost" in the field house will be removed. Mural's coming down. That image is done. We will go back to the old image from 1955 that had been up since the beginning of the whole "Gallop Ghost" idea, which is innocuous; it's a skeleton on a horse.

**Jamila Paksima:** To the teachers who wrote the faculty letter, this was neither "innocuous" nor a "solution."

**Tev Kelman:** It's a cloaked skeleton on a horse?

Our demand was a mascot that in no way resembles a racist symbol. Personally, if it had been my decision, I might have gone for a much cleaner break from the past.

**Dana Decker:** Honestly, the "Gallop Ghost" has already tainted the school. We just have to talk about it and come, you know, come up with a way to where we're all feeling safe, right?

**Cynthia Miller-Idriss:** I'm not crazy about symbols of death being used in educational spaces in general, but...

**Jamila Paksima:** Miller-Idriss of American University says due diligence is lacking in the superintendent's decision.

**Cynthia Miller-Idriss:** I don't think it's a great one to move from a symbol of racism to one that is, you know, a symbol of death.

**Jamila Paksima:** I've seen recent groups in the U.S., like Atom Waffin, The Base, use this symbol of the skeleton face as a mask.

**Cynthia Miller-Idriss:** Symbols of death, it includes skulls and crossbones. You know they were used on, um, Nazi insignia. They are used on these masks that the extreme far-right fringe uses in the States. They provoke fear and even a sense of threat.

**Jamila Paksima:** In the spring of 2020, the "Gallop Ghost" mascot was painted over in the gym and its image on all the school clocks will be replaced. The Black Lives Matter flag will remain despite opposition.

*[Elijah Hawkes garage door opening]*

**Jamila Paksima:** So, we're here in Elijah Hawkes's garage doing an interview during the pandemic.

**Jamila Paksima:** It's now mid-June and Geraldine and I have returned to Vermont. Students and teachers haven't gathered for class, proms, or any other activities due to COVID-19 local orders.

**Jamila Paksima:** This is a first. We're keeping our social distance. Thank you for doing the interview.

**Elijah Hawkes:** A first for me, too.

**Jamila Paksima:** The school never got to develop their new mascot and the advisory lessons were shelved.

**Jamila Paksima:** You have some former students who are now organizing a march. And they're doing this because they actually don't think enough is being done in this community to address racism.

**Elijah Hawkes:** I'm grateful and ready to act on those demands. It's appropriate to demand that. There's a need, absolutely.

*"Black Lives Matter!"*

**Jamila Paksima:** The next day we arrived at the Randolph "We Demand Change" march. I spotted Aamir, the 9th grader.

**Aamir:** We're at the peaceful protest in Randolph by RUHS.

*"Not one more life..."*

**Jamila Paksima:** He's endured years of repeated racial taunting at school. His sign, it says: "We matter too."

**Jamila Paksima:** How do you feel right now, looking at this crowd that's growing?

**Aamir:** I feel really safe and happy with other people protesting with me.

**Jamila Paksima:** Three hundred, mostly white allies, showed up to support the students of color, alumni, and organizers.

*"No justice! No peace!"*

*"No justice! No peace!"*

**Jamila Paksima:** They marched peacefully down the five blocks of mainstreet in Randolph. Every lamp post they pass is decorated with an American flag or a Vermont state flag.

**Zi Booska:** "I ask the staff members and administrators..."

**Jamila Paksima:** Zi Booska, a co-leader of the march and recent high school graduate, addressed the protestors gathered in a large semicircle in the park.

**Zi Booska:** I noticed through my two years of being invested in the fight of equality that this fight never ends.

**Jamila Paksima:** He reminded the crowd of the foundational work the students did at Randolph Union High School to raise the Black Lives Matter flag.

**Zi Booska:** We are going to see change in our community and change in our systematic, racist society that we live in because some white Americans finally see the fact that black lives matter.

**Jamila Paksima: And Brittney spoke about the student demands.**

**Brittney Park:** We are demanding a change to our curriculum to reflect accurate depictions of our nation's disgraceful history.

*[Cheering]*

*"Yes. So lovely."*

**Jamila Paksima:** *This young man just approached when all of the marchers and demonstrators were asked to lie down...*

**Jamila Paksima:** **During eight-minutes-and-46-seconds of extended silence, representing the time George Floyd was restrained and died during his arrest, a man shows up blaring heavy metal music and carrying a red duffle bag. It appeared to us he intended to disrupt the moment.**

**TeV Kelman:** And I looked up and saw this guy...

**Jamila Paksima:** **Teacher kelman and Brittney say it was scary.**

**TeV Kelman:** He was like walking down the path, getting closer to where there are a bunch of people.

**Brittney Park:** I just had to physically and mentally repeat to myself, *do not turn around*. I am terrified. I am scared.

**TeV Kelman:** He reached into his bag and pulled out nunchucks and started swinging them.

**Brittney Park:** Just swinging his nunchucks around. *Everything is okay, you are okay. We are okay.* And just repeating that over and over to myself as we got through that situation.

**Jamila Paksima:** Some of the de-escalators have gone out looking for him, sort of escorting him away from the crowd.

**Jamila Paksima:** **Thankfully, for everyone gathered, the disruption was handled by teacher Kelman and the de-escalators.**

**Brittney Park [Singing]:** *"That's when I'm gonna stand up, take my people with me..."*

**Jamila Paksima:** **As the protest is winding down, I'm standing with Aamir, talking to him about the song we are hearing.**

**Aamir:** These words mean to me that talking about people that are feeling pain and what they have to go through and showing that you're not alone. And if we keep going at the same pace as we are now, we won't have a future. So we have to work together so we can succeed in justice.

**Eric Ward:** It is time to lift one another up.

**Jamila Paksima:** **Eric Ward says supporting voices like Aamir's and other students is our best chance at solving bigotry and racism.**

**Eric Ward:** If we can't lift up our own children in our communities, how are we to stand by one another as Americans? We don't invest in our children by investing in bigotry. We invest by investing hope.

*[Clapping]*

**Jamila Paksima:** At the end of the event, I ran into Principal Hawkes, standing in the back wearing a James Baldwin T-shirt.

**Jamila Paksima:** Is this what dialog looks like?

**Elijah Hawkes:** There's honesty here today and that's an essential element of what dialogue looks like and I think there's listening here today.

**Jamila Paksima:** Alright.

**Jamila Paksima:** Thank you to Randolph Union High School, it's staff, and families for allowing us to tell their story.

Many times racists and the institutions they defend do so under the guise of freedom. They make us doubt ourselves and the work being done to build a safer world by stoking fears that we are all losing our freedoms. They are wrong.

*Sounds Like Hate* are stories about people who engage in extremism and hold onto lies -- and how they disengage from a life of hate.

**Geraldine Moriba:** *Baseless* is our next two-part story. We analyze secret recordings about an international extremist organization and find out revealing details about how they recruit young men into one of the most dangerous white supremacists groups in the U.S. today.

*I told them, 'I'm a Nazi. I have an AR-15. I'd be willing to defend my ideas with violent force.'*

*He seems smart.*

*Yeah. I give him a thumbs up. Yeah.*

**Geraldine Moriba:** These are complicated stories about people who hold onto false histories and terroristic ideologies – and draw boundaries that are skin deep.

**Jamila Paksima:** If you or anyone you know has experienced a hate incident or crime, please contact the appropriate local authority or elected official. You can also document what happened at [splcenter.org/reporthathe](https://splcenter.org/reporthathe).

**Jamila Paksima:** This is *Sounds Like Hate*, an independent documentary podcast series brought to you by the Southern Poverty Law Center. Additional funding provided by the Ring Foundation. I'm Jamila Paksima.

**Geraldine Moriba:** And I'm Geraldine Moriba. If you find this podcast interesting, then subscribe to find out when new episodes are released. And remember to rate and review. It really helps. Thank you for listening.