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Introduction and Background - Poverty in Metropolitan Richmond

John V. Moeser
University of Richmond, jmoeser@richmond.edu

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Introduction and Background

For almost ten years, Dr. John Moeser, Senior Fellow of the Bonner Center for Civic Engagement, has been analyzing U.S. Census data to track poverty trends among the localities of metropolitan Richmond. He started this project to inform the public about the growth of impoverishment and its effect on every aspect of urban life. As word began to circulate about the study, Dr. Moeser was invited by public officials, business executives, heads of non-profit organizations, and leaders in the faith community and neighborhood-based associations to speak and lead discussions about poverty including the history associated with the concentration of poverty and the steps that needed to be taken in the public and private sectors to build wealth and reduce poverty.

Requests for presentations kept growing and Dr. Moeser found it difficult to maintain such a demanding schedule. As a result, Hope in the Cities and the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities developed a partnership to provide funds for converting the presentation to a DVD. Kevin Heraldo, a talented videographer at the University of Richmond, agreed to produce the film, which was titled *Unpacking the Census*. With support from the Community Foundation Serving Richmond and Central Virginia, Hope in the Cities and the Virginia Center then sent out a call to people who would be interested in using the DVD to lead discussions, but first would commit to attending a two-day weekend workshop at Richmond Hill. Hoping to recruit 25 to 30 people, over 40 people responded. They included people from faith organizations and advocacy groups as well as educators, small business owners, and government employees. Area organizations were notified about the DVD and the availability of trained facilitators to lead conversations.

This large-scale project was announced in May 2011 at a convocation held at Virginia Commonwealth University. It was at this convocation that Mayor Dwight Jones launched his Anti-Poverty Commission.

Over one thousand people attended sixty-five *Unpacking the Census* presentations. The Kellogg Foundation funded an impact analysis of the presentations that was conducted by program evaluator Dr. Bonnie B. Dowdy. The report indicated that the presentation increased people's knowledge about the impact of poverty in the Richmond Region and the significance of local history on current patterns of poverty. Moreover, the analysis revealed that the presentations led to increased support for public policy interventions.

In May 2012, at a second convocation was held for those who had participated in the conversations. Mayor Jones spoke directly to the participants, noting that, "You will be the community that advocates for the ideas [of the Anti-Poverty Commission] to become reality."

Slides Posted on the UR Library Website

The slides on the University of Richmond Library website focus strictly on Census data pertaining to poverty trends in Richmond and its suburbs. They do not include slides related to the history of concentrated poverty or policy interventions necessary to address poverty.

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