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Growing Up in Civil Rights Richmond: A Community Remembers

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Growing Up in Civil Rights Richmond

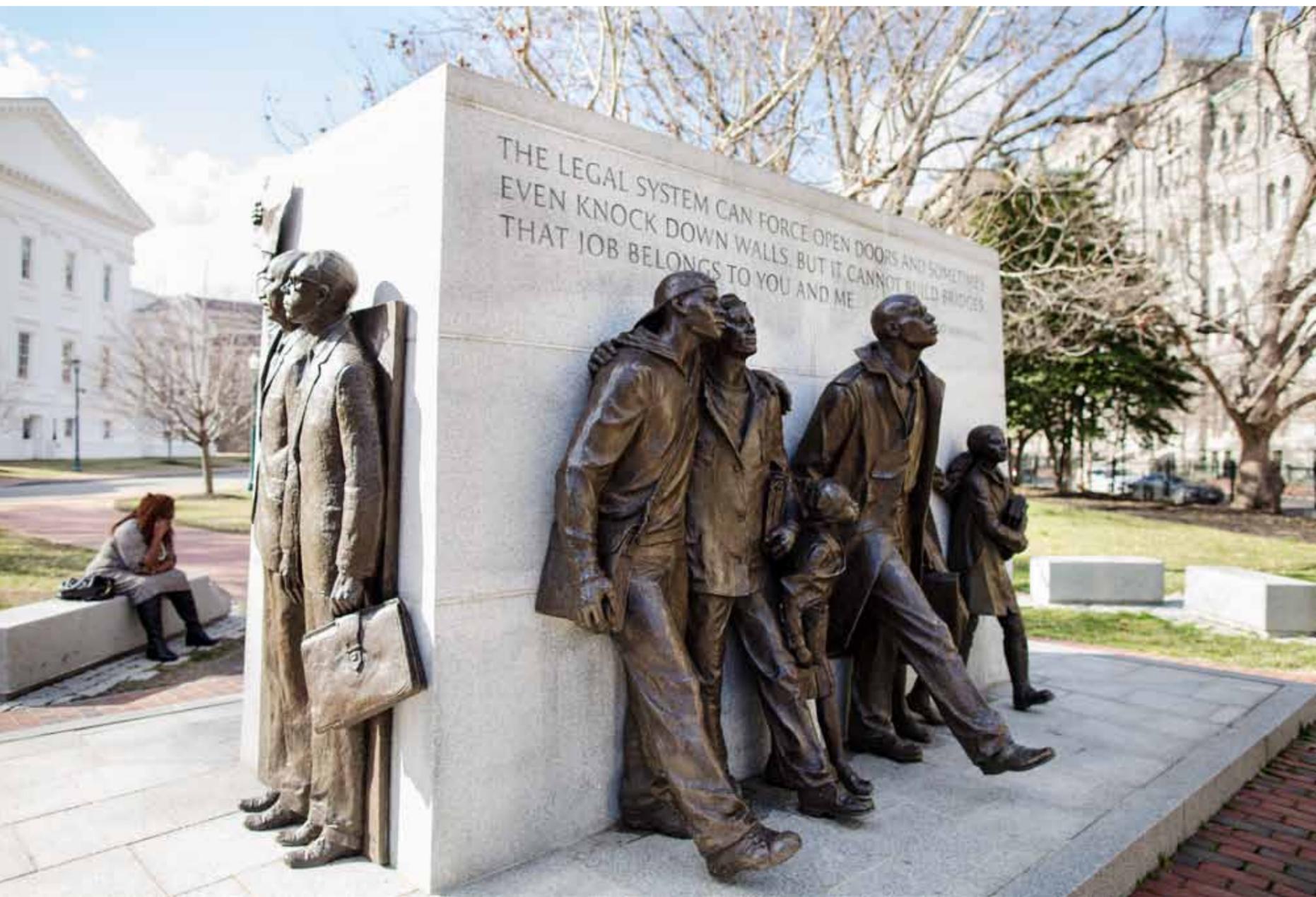
A COMMUNITY REMEMBERS



Photographs by BRIAN PALMER

Growing Up in Civil Rights Richmond

A COMMUNITY REMEMBERS



Brian Palmer, *Untitled* [20 February 2018, Virginia Civil Rights Memorial, Virginia State Capitol, Richmond], archival inkjet print on paper, 33.3 x 50 inches, lent courtesy of the artist

Growing Up in Civil Rights Richmond

A COMMUNITY REMEMBERS

Zenoria Abdus-Salaam
Philip H. Brunson III
Paige Lanier Chargois
John Dorman
Leonard L. Edloe
Glennys E. Fleming
Reginald E. Gordon
Robert J. Grey, Jr.
Woody Holton
Virginia P. Jackson
Mark R. Merhige
Renee Fleming Mills
Yvonne A. Mimms-Evans
Rev. Robin D. Mines
Tab Mines

Rev. Josine C. Osborne
Valerie R. Perkins
Mark Person
Royal Robinson
Elizabeth Salim
Myra Goodman Smith
Deborah Taylor
Yolanda Burrell Taylor
Mary White Thompson
Loretta Tillman
Daisy E. Weaver
Michael Paul Williams
Nell Draper Winston
Rebecca S. Wooden
Carol Y. Wray

PHOTOGRAPHS

Brian Palmer

ESSAYS

Elvatrice Belsches
Laura Browder
Ashley Kistler
Michael Paul Williams

UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND MUSEUMS

Published on the occasion of the exhibition
Growing Up in Civil Rights Richmond: A Community Remembers

Joel and Lila Harnett Museum of Art
University of Richmond Museums
January 17 to May 10, 2019

Organized by the University of Richmond Museums, the exhibition was developed
by Ashley Kistler, independent curator, and Laura Browder, Tyler and
Alice Haynes Professor of American Studies, University of Richmond.

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Essay "In Richmond, the Legacy of 1970 Casts a Shadow Over Our Civil Rights Movement" © Michael Paul Williams
Essay "Continuity and Community: The Role of Family Legacy and Portraiture in Brian Palmer's Recent Work" © Ashley Kistler

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Brian Palmer, *Untitled* [15 July 2017, West Broad Street at Adams Street, Richmond, Virginia; after the unveiling of the Maggie L. Walker Memorial], archival inkjet print on paper, 26.7 x 40 inches, lent courtesy of the artist

DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

RICHARD WALLER

Executive Director, University of Richmond Museums

To say this project has been a long time coming is an understatement. The lives profiled in image and text in *Growing Up in Civil Rights Richmond: A Community Remembers*, along with those of countless others who engaged with civil rights in Richmond in the 20th century, are still being compiled and, to our knowledge, are not widely or cohesively accessible in Richmond, much less internationally. Yet this history is vital to the complex story of America, as well as to understanding many of the issues that continue to face our nation today, particularly in terms of racism, education, social justice, and income inequality. It is critical that these personal experiences continue to be captured and shared, before memories fade.

Growing Up in Civil Rights Richmond, one of many contributions to this effort, complements recent important projects and scholarship, such as University of Richmond Professor Julian Maxwell Hayter's book, *The Dream is Lost: Voting Rights and the Politics of Race in Richmond, Virginia* (2017); the reclamation of East End and Evergreen Cemeteries, two long-neglected African American cemeteries of historical importance, being led at East End Cemetery by Brian Palmer (photographer for *Growing Up*) and his wife and collaborator, Erin Hollaway Palmer; the ongoing research and theatrical projects that *Growing Up in Civil Rights Richmond* contributor Professor Laura Browder and her colleague Professor Patricia Herrera have produced with our University of Richmond students over the past nine years, addressing segregation in the city; and the donation of the papers and archives of civil rights activist Reverend Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker to the University in 2016.

Meanwhile, the *Growing Up in Civil Rights Richmond* project itself has had various challenges, and several years have passed since the exhibition curator Ashley Kistler began her work and Laura Browder conducted the first interviews. However, the delays resulted in some significant opportunities: additional people were interviewed and their stories added to the rich tapestry of this important period in Richmond's history; Brian Palmer, an award-winning photojournalist, came onto the project and provided the compelling images in the exhibition; and the University of Richmond Museums became a project partner. We are privileged to assist in organizing the exhibition and producing and publishing the catalogue.

The successful realization of the project is due to the work of many people. We are indebted first and foremost to the interviewees, who so generously shared their time, memories, and emotions regarding their experiences growing up in the civil rights era. The community benefitted then and continues benefitting now by their actions as well as those of their family members and friends. We hope this exhibition and catalogue provide an appropriate and lasting tribute to their contributions.

We are grateful to Laura Browder, Tyler and Alice Haynes Professor of American Studies, University of Richmond, who shared her talents as an oral historian and her wisdom and expertise as a scholar and author, and to Ashley Kistler, independent scholar and curator and former director of the Anderson Gallery, Virginia Commonwealth University, for envisioning and shaping the project, and for their combined fortitude in seeing it through to fruition. They have shared

PREFACE

MYRA GOODMAN SMITH

President/CEO, Leadership Metro Richmond

When Laura Browder and Ashley Kistler met with me to engage the alumni of Leadership Metro Richmond in *Growing Up in Civil Rights Richmond: A Community Remembers*, I quickly realized that this project would be more than just pictures and words. It would be a memorable experience that captures stories we need to share about an era we need to understand; otherwise, these stories might be lost. A previous project undertaken by Laura and Ashley, which also paired oral histories with photographic portraits, gave comfort that our memories and truths would be conveyed with accuracy. As we recruited individuals for the project, I too agreed to take a walk back in time as a participant.

Growing Up in Civil Rights Richmond is an exhibition of photographs and narratives that explores the lives of 30 Richmond residents who came of age in the former capital of the Confederacy during a tumultuous time for our nation. These reflections go back to the days of our youth and continue on to include our perspectives as adults today. Documents recalling historical events in Richmond and the South during the 1950s and 60s are numerous, yet none are

quite like this collection. We have all seen the images of police dogs and water hoses and heard the stories of protest, but that was not the storyline of Richmond. We should recognize, however, that the absence of those events in our city does not negate the impact that era and our memories of it had on our development. Our lives were influenced by growing up at a time when Richmond was composed of segregated neighborhoods, schools, and houses of worship. Fifty years later, many of our children and grandchildren are growing up in communities still defined by some of these same conditions.

Hours of interviews revealed emotions and experiences powerful enough for us to have held on to these fragments of our lives for more than four decades. And each of these personal accounts is further illuminated by the sensitive portraits made by Brian Palmer, an accomplished photographer, journalist, filmmaker, and educator. While we were just a small subset of the approximately 60,000 school children in Richmond at that time, we hope that sharing our myriad experiences will generate richer conversations and a greater understanding of our shared history and how it continues to impact future generations. ■

their own acknowledgments in this publication to highlight some of the many people who assisted them on this journey. We are also deeply appreciative to Brian Palmer for his sensitive photographs of the interviewees, as well as his insightful depictions of locations relevant to the project's themes.

We extend our thanks to Laura and Ashley for their contributions to this catalogue, to public historian Elvatrice Belshes and *Richmond Times-Dispatch* columnist Michael Paul Williams for their essays, as well as to Myra Goodman Smith, President/CEO of Leadership Metro Richmond, for her preface, for participating as an interviewee, and for her continuous support of *Growing Up in Civil Rights Richmond*. The exhibition catalogue is made possible in part with a grant from the Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation. The exhibition, related programs, and this publication have been made possible in part with funds from the Louis S. Booth Arts Fund. Related programming at the University of Richmond is supported in part by a grant from the University's Cultural Affairs Committee.

The entire project includes many parts, including a companion exhibition about civil rights in Richmond prior to 1950, presented at the University of Richmond Downtown's Wilton Companies Gallery,

and a complementary exhibition on the work of Brian and Erin Palmer regarding East End and Evergreen Cemeteries, presented at 1708 Gallery. For these activities as well as for the fundraising efforts to support this entire project, we thank Alexandra Byrum, Assistant Director, Communications UR Downtown, Bonner Center for Civic Engagement, and Jennifer Stancil, Director, Foundation and Corporate Relations, University of Richmond, and Emily Smith, Executive Director, 1708 Gallery.

At the University of Richmond, our special appreciation goes to Dr. Ronald A. Crutcher, President; Dr. Jeffrey W. Legro, Executive Vice President and Provost; and Dr. Patrice D. Rankine, Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences, for their continuing guidance and support of the University Museums, comprising the Joel and Lila Harnett Museum of Art, the Joel and Lila Harnett Print Study Center, and the Lora Robins Gallery of Design from Nature. We would like to acknowledge our deep appreciation to Elizabeth Schlatter, Deputy Director and Curator of Exhibitions, University of Richmond Museums, who enthusiastically served as the project director for the organization of the exhibition and its accompanying catalogue. As always, we give our thanks and appreciation to the staff of the University Museums. ■



Brian Palmer, *Untitled* [27 June 2015, Monument Avenue, Richmond, VA; private contractor hired by the city scrubs graffiti from the Jefferson Davis monument] archival inkjet print on paper, 26.7 x 40 inches, lent courtesy of the artist

RVA, Richmond, and the Geography of Memory

LAURA BROWDER

*Tyler and Alice Haynes Professor of American Studies,
University of Richmond*

“Can The Old South Rebrand Itself? Richmond Tries, With A Dynamic New Logo” ran the headline of a 2012 article in the monthly business magazine *Fast Company*, announcing the city’s new logo, RVA — shorthand for Richmond, Virginia. “The former seat of the Confederacy has been quietly transforming itself into a more creative place,” explained author Emily Badger. “Now it has the visual identity to match.” Badger went on to describe the challenge faced by students at the VCU Brandcenter, who in 2010 were charged with rebranding the city, “a task more daunting given that Richmond has long had a strong, deeply embedded identity. This is the former seat of the Confederacy, the heart of Colonial America, the place where you go to learn about battlefields and founding fathers and early U.S. history.”¹

The city’s rebranding efforts have paid off, so much so that the city’s newspaper of record recently published “a list of the nearly 350 accolades for the Richmond region,” including such plaudits as one of “Most Fun Cities in America” by *Business Insider* and one of *Forbes.com*’s “10 Coolest U.S. Cities to Visit in 2018.”²

It is possible to drive through the historic black neighborhoods of Richmond today and see evidence of the change from Richmond to RVA in the new breweries, cideries, high-end furniture boutiques,

and other businesses catering to the young and affluent that have popped up in local communities undergoing transition. As travel writer Carrie Nieman Culpepper wrote in *The New York Times*:

*For decades, the 18th-century Church Hill neighborhood of Richmond, Va., has been a don’t-go-after-dark spot. One of the city’s oldest residential enclaves, its historic townhouses, gas lamps and St. John’s Church — where Patrick Henry proclaimed “Give me liberty or give me death” — have long been tended to by a small band of passionate preservationists in an area of encroaching crime and poverty. But undervalued real estate and unparalleled views of downtown and the James River have increasingly drawn a fiercely loyal, self-starter set of residents. These days, Church Hill has some of the city’s most appealing shops and dining spots.*³

What these articles point to is a disconnect that *Richmond Times-Dispatch* columnist Michael Paul Williams has written about: “We remain two Richmonds — RVA blossomed while Richmond is being left further and further behind.”⁴ RVA is sometimes coded white; *The New York Times* article seems racially coded in its reference to a “don’t-go-after-dark spot.” At the very least, RVA is colorless and is predicated on sweeping past Confederate and colonial histories to focus on the present. Richmond’s history, on the other hand, is more complex.

Also notably missing from the dominant, creativity-focused RVA narrative is any mention of Richmond's civil rights history, which seems to have been neither part of the "before" — the image that needed updating — or the "after" — the new, more palatable image of the city. RVA, as a place-making, advertising slogan implying a new conception of the city, has been widely embraced by tourists and many new residents. But the vibrant history of these neighborhoods, including Jackson Ward, which was once called "the Harlem of the South," has been lost from view. Absent from the city's new narrative are the Hippodrome and other famed black nightclubs, where entertainers such as Billie Holiday and Louis Armstrong performed, or the living rooms and offices where, in the 1950s, Oliver Hill and Spottiswood Robinson mapped out their legal strategies to take down segregation.

It is possible to sit at the bar at the Dutch & Company and Roosevelt restaurants in Church Hill and sip Belle Isle Moonshine, a liquor named for the prison island where Union prisoners of war were incarcerated and now one of the most popular outdoor sites along the James River, frequented today by kayakers and sunbathers. Yet the memory of the many shot houses that once dotted the neighborhood — informal African American bars, housed in private residences, where it was possible to get a drink and listen to records — is fading fast.

And it is not just the texture of these neighborhoods that has been lost. More than one longtime resident has told me that also missing are the thriving black businesses and the sense of a neighborhood so strong that it was routine for people to enter their neighbors' unlocked houses to borrow a cup of sugar. Some of the most important civil rights struggles of the 20th century are also invisible and seemingly unrecorded.

In contrast with cities like Atlanta, where — jokes an archivist friend of mine — everyone who ever participated in a civil rights march has been interviewed more than once, and where civil rights tourism is an established industry, Richmond has few markers of our rich African American history. In contrast to Monument Avenue, with its statues of Confederate generals that have for a century drawn tourists to Richmond, the United States Civil Rights Trail lists a single monument: the Virginia Civil Rights Memorial at the state capitol, which focuses on Barbara Johns, a leader in Farmville's struggle to desegregate schools in the 1950s — in other words, someone not from Richmond. This monument, unlike those of the Confederate generals, is not a destination, but rather something one might come across while visiting the Capitol. However, the local heroes of the civil rights struggle, both sung and unsung, are often undiscussed, and the sites where they picketed, were arrested, fought their legal battles, and desegregated schools remain unmarked.

Until recently, there was nothing to commemorate Richmond's role as the second-largest slave market in the nation, after New Orleans. Today, there is the Richmond Slave Trail, though this title is misleading; it contains few markers and is easy to miss. And while resistance to slavery is noted in a historic marker commemorating the slave rebellion planned by Gabriel Prosser in 1800, more recent moments of activism are often omitted: there is nothing to educate visitors or residents about the 1904 streetcar boycott, which was held to protest the new segregation of the cars a full 50 years before Rosa Parks and the Montgomery bus boycott.

Because this history is so invisible, few know that the Communist Party USA-affiliated Southern Negro Youth Congress was founded in this city in 1937, at a meeting that included such luminaries as W.E.B. DuBois and Mary McCleod Bethune, as well as members of the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and representatives from nearly every black

college in the country. Members of the SNYC led a strike with black women tobacco workers that resulted in a significant raise; and they founded a theater group that performed dramas for black audiences about gaining the right to vote in an era of poll taxes. Where are their stories today?

In Maggie Walker's Jackson Ward house, a National Historic Site run by the National Park Service, there are photos of most of the important civil rights figures of the early 20th century sitting in the living room of this native Richmonder, who was a pivotal figure in the African American community. But apart from these images, there are few traces of the intellectual and political imprints left by these people during their time in Richmond. Likewise, there is no monument to the early 20th-century black newspaper editor John Mitchell, whose anti-lynching editorials made him and the *Richmond Planet* bywords among African Americans nationwide.

The history of the late-1930s black arts collective housed in Craig House in Church Hill is little known, along with the memory of black artist Benjamin Wigfall's arrest outside Miller & Rhoads in 1957 on charges of shoplifting. Wigfall had taken one of his Hampton University art students there to see his painting *Chimneys* (1951), now in the permanent collection of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Local civil rights attorney Oliver Hill, already famous for his role in arguing the landmark school desegregation case *Brown vs. Board of Education* before the Supreme Court, took on Wigfall's case and got the trumped-up charge dismissed.⁵

Of course, the stories of some famous black "firsts" are well-known. Richmond school children learn of Douglas Wilder, the nation's first black governor, and Maggie Walker, the first female bank president of any race. Richmonders with an interest in civil rights have heard of the Richmond 34, a group of Virginia Union University students

arrested for their sit-in at a lunch counter at Thalheimer's department store, who appealed their conviction all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court — and won. Yet few today can imagine the daily texture of life for those whose world was turned upside down as a result of the civil rights movement.

During an era when many of these struggles were taking place, numerous Richmond public schools were being named for Confederate heroes. For example, the Robert E. Lee School opened in 1919, as black veterans were coming back to Richmond from WWI, and as race riots erupted in cities across the nation. Virginia, after all, has the second-largest number of public schools named for Confederate icons.

For several years now, it has been my privilege to sit with some longtime Richmonders as they told me about their lives. Many of them were born during the Jim Crow era and came of age in the civil rights movement. Sitting with them in their homes, in rooms reserved in public libraries, or at the ecumenical retreat center Richmond Hill, and listening to their stories has changed the way I experience the city in which I have lived for the past 24 years.

Driving through the Carver neighborhood on my way to see a movie with my kids, I think about Virginia Jackson, growing up in a four-room house on Moore Street with 12 or 13 relatives, all of them supported by her factory-worker mother. I think of John Dorman at age 12, getting his political education at the segregated YMCA from Virginia Union University students who taught him karate and took him on his first marches.

I see a GRTC bus passing by and remember Royal Robinson telling me that when the schools were first desegregated, he spent two hours each way getting to and from George Wythe High School

from Church Hill daily, on two different public buses. I think about all of the people who have shared stories of defying the color line on the bus and the consequences of that.

I cross the James River to Southside and remember Robin Mines telling me how, when her family moved to the white Swansboro neighborhood in the 1960s, the Klan burned a cross in her front yard. Two weeks after her family's arrival, her house was riddled by shotgun blasts. Of course, today it is impossible to see the traces of that experience. Sometimes whole neighborhoods disappeared like Navy Hill, destroyed during highway construction. The memories of all of those who lived and struggled through the civil rights era, who experienced sometimes painful awakenings, who founded new organizations, and mapped out lives that were very different from their parents are often not well known.

When my daughter, Nina, started studying at Thomas Jefferson High School, I recalled Reggie Gordon, one of the first black students there, telling me about how he and his classmates wrote poetry in French, and that the school swept six out of the top ten places in the state language competition. I remembered this as I sat in a parent-teacher conference with Nina's Spanish teacher, who shared with me that he really did not speak Spanish. It was hard to reconcile the school that Reggie described with the one my daughter experienced.

Conducting these interviews over a period of years for multiple projects enabled me to approach a single place and time from multiple, often linked perspectives. When my collaborator and university colleague Patricia Herrera and I were working with our students on creating a play about the years of mandatory busing at George Wythe, a project instigated by Wythe alum Mark Person, we

invited a small group of alumni to meet with our class. Unbeknownst to us, Mark had called a reporter at the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, who included a small item in the newspaper the day of our class that announced the time and location of the event. Over 20 alumni showed up, evenly divided between black and white. Many of them had not seen one another for 40 years. During their 90-minute conversation, they learned how different their perspectives were.

Several women, black and white, talked about their cheerleading coach, who had integrated the squad during the height of racial tensions at the school. Given the reverence in which they held her, everyone in the class was anxious to find Ms. Mimms, whom they thought might live in a retirement community if she was even still alive. I was shocked when I finally met Yvonne Mimms-Evans, a vibrant, energetic woman, and discovered that she had been only four years older than her students when she worked with them. Hearing her account of integrating the cheering squad helped me understand why she remained such an inspirational figure for her former students.

A couple of the interviewees were the children of key figures during the civil rights era. Mark Merhige's father was the federal judge who ordered busing to take place in 1970. The family's dog was shot; Judge Merhige was spat upon in restaurants; and the Ku Klux Klan picketed his house each weekend. Woody Holton's father was Governor Linwood Holton, who desegregated the Richmond schools by enrolling his own children in formerly all-black schools. Robert Grey's mother, Barbara Grey, created John B. Cary model school, the innovative elementary school that my own children attended. His father was executive director of the Urban League at the height of the civil rights movement.

Many of the interviewees found themselves playing a role in the great historical changes of their time, whether they desegregated schools, picketed department stores, leafleted for the Richmond Crusade for Voters or, like Reverend Josine Osborne, served as the state president of the NAACP Youth Council. In all of these accounts, history feels very close to the surface. As Zenoria Abdus-Salaam, Virginia Jackson's daughter, told me:

*When I looked at the census, even though I had always known that my great-great-grandfather was a slave, when I saw "servant" beside his name, it just brought me to tears. Hearing it is one thing. Seeing it on documents is something else again. That was a turning point in my life — to really know that yes, this was a real deal here in Richmond, Virginia. And it wasn't that long ago. The narratives always make it seem like it was a thousand years ago, but it was not. It was yesterday.*⁶

The experiences that the people whose stories and portraits fill these pages had during the civil rights era changed their lives in profound ways. Elizabeth Salim, who attended George Wythe during the busing era, participated in integrating the cheerleading squad. She went on to marry a Palestinian man from Jerusalem who attended a Jewish high school and noted, "I feel like we experienced the same thing, you know, going to a high school where we were the minority, and learning how to get along and move in both cultures."⁷ As Loretta Tillman told me, "That whole time period was about what could be. I never lost that. Not one day out of my life have I lost that. And I raised my children with that."⁸

Today, it seems more important than ever that we hear these stories and see these faces. A few years ago, Patricia Herrera and I had our students perform a scene from the aforementioned play about

George Wythe at Henderson Middle School on North Side. Our students were taken aback at the noise levels they experienced when they walked into the school. During the early 1970s, when Henderson was built, planners believed that having classrooms with cubicle-style partitions, rather than more traditional walls, would facilitate the flow of knowledge. This architectural "innovation" ultimately created a constant cacophony that challenged the school's population. Yet 40 years after the school was built, this failed educational experiment continues.

As we entered the packed auditorium, it appeared that every single child and teacher present was African American. After our students performed the scene they had written about the integration of the cheerleading squad at Wythe, they conducted a talk-back with the audience. When one of our students asked if anyone in the audience knew what segregation meant, one of the Henderson students raised his hand: "Segregation was a bad thing that happened long ago in the past," he told us.

In the parking lot afterwards, Patricia and I talked with our students about what had happened. The Henderson students seemed to be living in a world as completely segregated as that experienced by our interviewees who grew up under Jim Crow. Perhaps because their state-mandated civil rights education was so bland and incomplete, Henderson students could not connect their lived reality with the segregation their textbooks assured them was a bad thing that was safely in the past. While our own class was equally divided between white and black students, a few of them reflected uncomfortably on the University of Richmond's legacy of segregation.

The stories the 30 individuals participating in *Growing Up in Civil Rights Richmond* shared with me demonstrated that, to quote

William Faulkner, “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”
As Zenoria Abdus-Salaam told me as she was mapping out her childhood world, “Where the coliseum is now was Navy Hill. Things change, you know. But those things don’t change for people who called it home.”

This exhibition and catalogue were intended to create a lasting record of the voices and portraits of individuals who lived through and helped shape the civil rights era in Richmond. In so doing, the project is also an effort to map what was onto what is — to document, in other words, the Richmond before RVA that lives on in memory, but rarely in public view. ■

ENDNOTES

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6. Zenoria Abdus-Salaam interview, July 21, 2018.
7. Elizabeth Salim interview, May 20, 2015.
8. Loretta Tillman interview, May 15, 2018.
9. Zenoria Abdus-Salaam interview, July 21, 2018.

Growing Up in Civil Rights Richmond

A COMMUNITY REMEMBERS

All portraits for *Growing Up in Civil Rights Richmond: A Community Remembers* are by **Brian Palmer** (American, born 1964), archival inkjet prints on paper, 30 x 40 inches or 37.5 x 50 inches, lent courtesy of the artist.

The interviews in this publication are edited excerpts from longer conversations conducted by **Laura Browder** over several years. The full transcripts will be made available in the future on the existing UR archive “The Fight for Knowledge: Civil Rights and Education in Richmond, VA” fightforknowledge.richmond.edu

Rev. Josine Osborne

Richmond has never been a city that wants to keep its dirty laundry out there. People are talking about removing statues down south. You would think that up here this would be a piece of cake, but it's not.

Richmond had the big plantations along the James. The Braxton Plantation, that's where my mother's family comes from. Buckingham County, near Appomattox, that's where my father came from. People talked very openly about the South and about their experience in Buckingham. They kept those stories alive.

In the Church Hill community where I grew up, everybody had a trade or hustle or some way to barter. That's why I looked at each part of Richmond's black community as being self-contained. That's one of the things we didn't really plan for with integration: people's dollars went outside of the community, so the economics went out. It was another world.

I am the oldest of four children. My mother was the baby of thirteen. My father was the third of thirteen. My mother was the first to go to college; she was a mathematician. She wanted to finish school but when we came along, she wanted each one of her children to go where she could not. I often think of her devotion, especially when I hear people who were in school with her say that she had a lot of talent, a lot of gifts.

My mother was very strict. She wanted us to behave and be in our place so that the system would not hurt us. I was the kind of person who was always pushing buttons, always seeing and asking, and not knowing that all I had to do was be in the wrong place at the wrong time and something bad could happen. One time when we were only kids, we thought we were going to a Christmas parade and ended up at the Confederate parade. But Daddy was not scared; honestly, he was fearless.

As I was beginning to grow up, things were changing. Virginia Union University attracted people from all over the nation — Martin Luther King, Wyatt Tee Walker. Every strategic thing we had to do to foster change was done on campus. James Farmer and Wyatt Tee Walker showed us how to protect ourselves. These are the kinds of things that the NAACP did because they knew we could be hurt. We would go to Virginia Union and have our meetings. By the time that I came on, we were keeping up the resistance, the constant activities. Then we would go downtown and have sit-in activities. We would never do anything after dark.

The overall community came together to support the youth, whatever you wanted to do. If they saw some talent in you, they really pushed you out front. My second year in high school, I went to the Encampment for Citizenship and Democracy in Barbourville, Kentucky, supported by Eleanor Roosevelt, two summers in a row. I made my decision to be very serious about civil rights when I went to a conference that was held at a hotel in Roanoke. The last night of the conference we had what they call a "Freedom Dinner." I saw the Ku Klux Klan come out of nowhere. It was such a shocking thing for me. It was up in your face.

All of a sudden, it seemed like I had strong convictions; and if I feel strongly about something, it just runs out of my mouth. I'll say it; I'll react to it. And so it was a turning point. In 1966, I was voted in as a president of the Youth Council for the state NAACP.

Today, I look at the kids in Fairfield Court and Creighton Court and realize they very rarely have an opportunity to go outside of this community. And then I think about all the different people who came to my aid and helped me to get outside of that community, and what a difference it made in my life. ■



Rev. Josine C. Osborne, Riverview Baptist Church, 2018

Robert J. Grey, Jr.

I've been lucky to have had a family that embraced change as far back as I can remember. My father was a professional photographer for the Army, so my first four years were spent in France and Germany. It was interesting for me to see a very diverse community in Europe and then come back to the States to a very segregated community, which was the case in 1954-55. But life in Richmond for a kid of that generation was one that was really centered around community.

Most of the people that lived on my street were professionals. Mr. Broadnax was a photographer, and Mr. Eggleston owned a hotel. Battery Park was a congregation center for all of the kids, and it was within walking distance.

I remember my father was involved with other community leaders in helping to rebuild housing and increasing the quality of housing stock for those who were trying to achieve middle-class status. The whites left the city to go to the counties during the '50s and early '60s. From the '60s to the '70s, blacks were leaving the city to go to the counties because they thought there were better opportunities. We had to start thinking about different housing opportunities for these families and creating communities that were sustainable within the city.

My mother was a librarian and then an administrator. After integration, she started working as an education advisor to schools as a supervisor and consultant within the school system. She went to John B. Cary Elementary and created a model school in terms of integration. She was a very hands-on educator and loved her teachers and her students.

Richmond and the rest of Virginia were positioned to lead the resistance against integration. Harry Byrd and the Byrd Machine felt very strongly that integration was just not going to work. Closing schools in other parts of the state was a significant issue. But an even more difficult problem had to do with voting and the poll tax.

Milton Brooks, Fergie Reed, and Bill Thornton formed Richmond Crusade for Voters in the mid-50s. Their work was to ensure that blacks in this community understood the value of their vote, that

they had to participate, and that they had to fight for that right. Even if there was a poll tax, a requirement to know some part of the constitution, or other tests that might discourage them from voting, they had to go vote. Through their work in our community, the black leaders in Richmond played a national role in the way our country has evolved.

My earliest memories have to do with being part of that organization to educate the community. I remember putting flyers in people's doors that the Crusade for Voters had prepared. Then we had the sit-ins by Virginia Union students organized in part by the Crusade. I got to see all of that. I was too young to do the actual sit-ins, but I was commissioned to be part of the community outreach that helped people be better aware of their rights, to go out and vote, and to organize around the idea that we needed better education, better jobs, and better housing.

I ended up going to Chandler Junior High School on Brookland Parkway as a result of integration. You felt like an intruder. This wasn't your school; this was somebody else's school you had been told to go to. And so you never really owned the experience.

I remember going out to Varina to a track meet and seeing a sign at a service station that said, "Do you wanna save this land? Join the Klan." And I saw a big cross in the back that was obviously going to be set on fire.

Going to law school was something I had been exposed to through Oliver Hill, Henry Marsh, Doug Wilder, and others in my community who held leadership positions. I went to law school because of the stature those individuals held, and the esteem with which they were held in my community. Oliver Hill's son was a year older than me, and I grew up in his house as much as I did my own.

I understand what it means not to be fair — how you can harm somebody, not physically but emotionally and intellectually, and scar them deeply. I have always thought it important, having this understanding and background, to always work to improve society's view of its community and the people who are in it. ■



Robert J. Grey, Jr., Hunton Andrews Kurth LLP, 2018

Deborah Taylor

I was an only child, and my mother passed away when I was 11. At that point, my aunt and uncle took me in with their four children. We were always close anyway, but I became their fifth child. We lived in Church Hill; my mom's sisters all lived in Church Hill, not far from each other. My grandparents' home was the nucleus for the family.

I can remember going downtown, and there was a Ku Klux Klan rally going down the middle of Broad Street. I remember my mom saying to me, "Keep walking, don't stop." And I'm going, "Why? Why can't I look at the people with the hoods on?" She's telling me, "If you stop, you're gonna get hurt. Keep walking." I guess I was about four or five.

As a child, I remember City Council changing. I remember Henry Marsh running for a council seat and for mayor. He was a close personal friend of my parents. We'd go by his house, and my dad would toot and wave. Doug Wilder also grew up with them.

I remember when Thalhimers had separate bathrooms for whites and blacks. I had an aunt who used to work in the Miller & Rhoads Tearoom; she was maybe one of the first blacks to work the cash register there.

During the time period when we were growing up in, you *knew* the only way you were going to be successful or make it in life was to have an education. We knew, from having seen enough family members who didn't complete high school, what it was like to struggle just to keep a roof over your head and food on the table.

I remember my first black history course at Armstrong High School; I wanted to be a history teacher. Our teachers and

administrators felt pride in their jobs. They did not mind staying late or putting up funds if this child didn't have lunch money; it was just something they did. We had a teacher who came by the house because my sister didn't go to school. When the white kids were bused to Armstrong, I remember a white guy serving on our student council. Our first runner-up for Miss Armstrong in '72 was a white girl.

We had a science teacher who came in and said he had scholarships to Virginia State University for geology and earth science. The majority of our class got scholarships. I realized I wasn't going to become a dancer, and I wasn't going to study black history. I was going to study earth science and geology. Not that that was what I wanted to do, but it was a struggle for my parents to pay for my college education; they already had two other kids in college, and one coming out the same time as me. I realized then if I wanted to go to school, I had to take that scholarship. I studied geology for four years and realized that was not my calling in life.

I still have not gotten to that point in life to doing what I *truly* want to do. Now I'm at that stage of life where I can weigh those things and say, "Well, I did this; I've done that. What's my heart telling me to do now?"

Right now, my heart is saying: I want to work in the community. I volunteer for a breast cancer group — Sisters Network, an African American survivorship group. I like to help people see that they can uplift themselves. You don't have to depend on somebody to uplift you because that comes from within. ■



Deborah Taylor, Franklin Military Academy (formerly East End High School), 2017

Michael Paul Williams

I grew up a half a block from Fountain Lake in Byrd Park. It was a wonderful, idyllic kind of childhood. My mom was the second black person to purchase a house there. She was a Korean War widow whose first husband died in Korea while she was pregnant with my older brother. Several months later, our block was entirely African American. By the time I gained any awareness as a kid, it was an all-black neighborhood, as were the adjacent neighborhoods of Randolph and Maymont. That's what I knew. We lived there until 1967. Construction of the downtown expressway started a couple of blocks away and shaved off a chunk of Byrd Park. My mom said, "No, I can't deal with this." And so we moved out to the suburbs.

My mom had met her second husband, my dad, when she'd decided to go back to school. Since my parents were Catholic, they sent us to what was then Cathedral Elementary School.

I'm in first grade. Johnson is president, and he's running against Goldwater. I remember thinking, "It's weird. All the white kids are for Goldwater! Goldwater's gonna win! There's no way Johnson could win because everyone's for Goldwater." And then Goldwater got his ass kicked.

Around this time, I remember being in the schoolyard and hearing some of the older kids saying this poem: "In 1964, my father went to war. He pulled the trigger and killed the nigger and that was the end of the war." We were fighting a war in Vietnam, and we were in the middle of the Cold War, but the real enemy was black people.

I had some fond memories of the school. The teachers and most of the kids were nice, but I'll never forget that. And then the school closed. This was my first experience with a certain manifestation of white flight.

The few of us who were left, white and black, were sent by the diocese to attend St. Benedict Catholic School. At the end of my sixth-grade year, I let slip that my family no longer belonged to the city's Cathedral parish, and the principal at St. Benedict said, "Aha!

Well, then you can't come back next year." I think she viewed me as a troublemaker. That's how I processed it at the time, though it seems pretty arbitrary in hindsight. I wasn't heartbroken to leave the school, but I did think this was kind of funky. Then I ended up at St. Elizabeth's School, which was in Highland Park.

I walk up on the first day. New school. Starting all over. About a half dozen of the white kids came walking over, and their body language was hostile. The biggest one was like, "What are you? A Yankee or a Rebel?" This was seventh grade. I'm not the swiftest person in the world but I knew the Civil War had been over for more than a century. I figured out what this was about and knew damn well I wasn't a Confederate, so: "I'm a Yankee." That probably got me off on the wrong foot. For the next two years, I felt like I was constantly reliving the Civil War.

I had been a standout student. And then by about the eighth grade, I was a student who got by okay without a whole lot of effort. I had stopped applying myself. Probably thought that was cool. So I ended up at Hermitage High School. It was a huge shock to the system. Maybe you have to go to a Catholic or other parochial school to understand how it feels different when you're in a public school environment.

My brother had gone to Benedictine Prep. I wasn't really enthusiastic about that. The whole military thing was not that appealing in the context of Vietnam and the black power movement. I just didn't feel like polishing shoes and shining brass for the next four years and taking orders.

They had just built a brand-new Hermitage, which was like a Taj Mahal back in the day. I'm like, "Why wouldn't I want to go to this brand new school with my friends? I don't want to go to school with a bunch of guys," even though to have a conversation with a girl would be like a bridge too far, much less to have a date. I think I started writing for the school paper junior or senior year. It just seemed like something that would be fun to do. I certainly wasn't thinking of it as a career. ■



Michael Paul Williams, Maggie L. Walker Memorial Plaza, 2018

Daisy E. Weaver

I left Richmond for about 17 years. I never really thought about what a small path I followed growing up until I came back and realized, "Well, you know, I never really went west of Brook Road very much." We didn't venture out a lot from that neighborhood. We played in the neighborhood; we went to church and school in the neighborhood.

Seeing what my father did in raising the nine of us was one of the things that shaped me. It's a strong, strong work ethic that I've maintained throughout my life. Typically, you would stay in the housing projects three to four years, and if your family got too big or your income got a little bit better, you moved on. A number of the families that I knew in Whitcomb Court came to the North Side as well.

I enjoyed school; I was the nerd of the family. I remember getting the letter saying that I was a National Merit Scholar. I accepted a scholarship from Duke. In '68, I went as a freshman. The first black ever to graduate from Duke graduated in '67. I felt a little bit isolated, but luckily I had two good minority friends in the dorm.

In Richmond, I was in the cocoon of my family, school environment, and the neighborhood that I was comfortable in. We saw the water hoses and the dogs on TV, but that was down South, you know? It didn't dawn on me as a kid growing up that I was necessarily in that same place. It wasn't until I got to Duke that things started to come together for me.

At that time, there were still maids in the dorms who actually came and emptied the trash and cleaned your room. We wanted to see them treated a little better. My father was a custodian, so I did not feel comfortable at all having this lady come and clean my room. I treated them with a lot of respect because it was the same thing my father did.

My freshman year, the black students participated in the takeover of the administration building. I was scared to death. We had demands, such as books in the library, black professors. When we went into the building, we all expected to be put out of school. The administration didn't know everybody's name. They were only going to take the ringleaders that they identified through this court process. But we all stood up and gave them our names. Our rationale was that they were not going to kick every black student off campus.

There was an article in the *Richmond News Leader* or the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* about those "crazy black students" at Duke who took over the administration building. I remember writing a letter to the editor to say that we were not crazy; we had legitimate concerns. That was my first letter to the editor.

I will say that the folks at Duke did try to meet some of our demands. We were listened to. We actually ended up getting an African American Studies program. We got a student union and space in the building where we could meet.

Throughout the four-year period I was there, we stayed involved in protests happening in the Durham community. There were several community organizers who stayed on campus; and we made a connection with North Carolina Central University, which was across town.

There was power and support being with that strong group of people. Those students were extraordinary. And they brought a lot of leadership skills with them. Just being among people who had enough courage to say something helped my courage. Now, would I have ever done it alone? I don't know. But I think being a part of the group that came into Duke at that time helped to push me. ■



Daisy E. Weaver, First African Baptist Church, 2017

Paige Lanier Chargois

We came from Southampton County. My maternal grandfather's house is right on the road with Nat Turner's historic marker. Southampton County is known for many blacks being first at this, that, or the other. Which suggests to me that we were not afraid of a fight, not afraid to stand tall on what we truly believed. It came natural to us because that's where so much of the fighting to try to free ourselves from slavery emerged here in Virginia.

I went to junior high school at Benjamin A. Graves, and that's where the efforts to desegregate the Richmond public schools began.

Some of us were hand-picked for extra training as to what to do, how to handle ourselves as children. We were 11, 12 years old. They told us the mean things that people might do to us, that we could not respond like that. If they spat on us, we were not to spit back at them. We were told that we had to be very strong because nobody knew exactly what was going to happen and what people might do — hit us or whatever — but once we got off the bus, we had to keep our eyes focused on the school and walk straight into it, and not worry about what people were hollering out. The big n-word, of course, was used profusely. But we could not return those kinds of comments to the people who were hollering at us. They drilled that into us.

I would imagine that I felt honored to have been chosen. But it just seemed like another task at the time that we had to do. My parents were very active in the PTA. The NAACP, the church, and the PTA were quite involved and working together on the effort.

Nothing happened at all. But whether I had a chance to walk into a desegregated school or not, that was when I was turned on to the movement. Some of us selected as leaders were the ones who took the bull by the horns, to be as involved as we could be as children. Sometimes we would leave school after classes and take the bus downtown to be able to start marching.

I wore out shoes walking around those stores and in front of the movie houses. The impetus really was from my family; I would say primarily my father, but also my mom. My dad participated some. My mom cut up her Thalhimers and Miller & Rhoads credit cards. We had many conversations in the household.

When you're demonstrating, you had to get over your own fatigue, your own loss of strength, from hours and hours of walking around. It gets a little monotonous. The people who are actually on the line, they're the ones who'll hold you up. That's what really kept us going. As young people, we actually had to face and stare down dogs that could have eaten us alive. And that'll put some steel in your spine.

I've spent about 20 years in racial reconciliation, so I know that was part of shaping my life professionally. When we went to India, they were singing "We Shall Overcome" in Hindi. And when the two Germanies were reunited, they were singing "We Shall Overcome" in German. Whether you could overcome in that moment or not was unimportant. But you knew that we shall — off in the future a little bit — overcome. ■



Paige Lanier Chargois, Richmond Slave Trail along the James River, 2018

Reginald E. Gordon

My family moved to Richmond in 1967. Prior to that, we were living in Blackstone, Virginia, a town 60 miles southwest of here. Because of the times, my father decided he wanted me to integrate the primary school in Blackstone. It made the newspaper; it was a big deal. There were six of us who went to the school. Evidently, there was some discussion with my parents and after that, my father didn't want to subject his children to this kind of experience. So that's why we moved to Richmond. My mother was upset because she thought we were moving from a manageable small town to a big scary city.

My father was a Baptist minister; my mother was a school teacher. My family moved into the Battery Park neighborhood with tree-lined streets. Kids rode their bicycles, and we had a park nearby with tennis courts and a swimming pool. There were days when we would hear, "Arthur Ashe is down at the park!" and we'd all go run and watch him hit tennis balls. Everyone seemed successful. And educated. And interesting. It was great!

At Norrell Elementary, we had chorus and sock hops. The Jackson 5 was big, and I remember being in the cafeteria just dancing around in our socks, listening to Michael Jackson. It was bright, sunny, uplifting. I felt really cared for and loved by the people there.

My father had diabetes. He lost his sight by the time I was in the fifth grade. Because Norrell was so close, we were allowed to leave school during the day, walk home, fix lunch for our dad, and go back to school. I found out less than three years ago that my younger brother used to sneak out of class to watch me go home to fix lunch for my dad. He was afraid I would forget.

And then busing started for me. I didn't feel unprepared. I don't remember being afraid or anxious.

At Thomas Jefferson High School, I thought it was natural to have a very integrated circle of friends. We were in key club together and other social groups. We even went on camping trips together.

I don't remember any tension, but then there were fewer and fewer white kids. Even some of my friends started disappearing. TJ was about 50/50 when I started; when I left, 70/30. Quite a significant drop in the number of white kids.

Because we'd all been taking French since the second grade, by the time we got to senior year, most of us were extremely fluent. In those days, I could write poetry, all kinds of stuff in French. Our French class went to Paris and Geneva. There was a statewide French competition and TJ placed one through ten — we beat out all the private schools in Richmond.

When I was ready to go to college, I felt the sky was the limit. We were going to get veterans' education benefits for me. This gentleman who was in charge of benefits said, "Where do you want to go to school?" "Duke." And he said, "You should set your goals lower." My father, who was blind, got up and said, "We are leaving. My son will go to Duke if I have to pay for it myself." And that's what they did. They forfeited a couple of appliances around the house, and I got some scholarships, but that's how I ended up going to Duke. And it meant a lot to me. My dad died after my first year there. When I graduated, I remember crying because that story is what propelled me into Duke.

One time at Duke, I was sitting in a class. I was the only black among a hundred kids, and the professor was discussing urban blight or urban poverty. He looked at the course list and figured out what my name was and said, "Reginald Gordon, what is it like to grow up in the ghetto?" I stood up and said, "I didn't grow up in the ghetto." I heard some chuckling. And he said, "It's okay, this is college, you can help your classmates understand. This is not their experience, but it's your experience, so tell us how that was." And I said, "It was not my experience." So we had this back and forth in front of everybody. That was a jolt! Just because of how I'm packaged, this learned professor is trying to create an experience for others to hear what black life was like. It was the kind of experience that doesn't always get told, not even to this day. ■



Reginald E. Gordon, Office of Community Wealth Building, 2017

Mary White Thompson

I was born in 1937. We had eight children in the family. My mom had a third-grade education, but I'm proud to say that she was a woman of wisdom and a discerner of people. I think that's a gift. My mom found this very home that we are in today in 1952. It was a joy for me to upscale and move into this Church Hill community. I've been here ever since and don't regret a moment of it. I stayed here with my mom and dad. I got married here. My dad died right here in the home.

My husband and I raised five children in this community, and a beautiful community it was. My husband and I were blessed to share 60 years together.

We had black businesses, black entrepreneurs on 25th Street. I don't know what happened. The Jews were part of the community, and they were real respectful to us.

We helped to raise each other's children; all of the adults took responsibility for the children. They had wonderful activities in the community. After our children grew up and went off to college, then our community looked like it began to die. I suddenly woke up one day and said, "What is happening to our community?" Homes had become blighted, and children were not coming back.

Better Housing Coalition was the community developer. Their presence was already here. We had a community meeting at Mount Olivet Church, and it warmed my heart when T. K. Somanath, who was CEO of Better Housing Coalition, asked: "What do you want?" When he said that, I knew we were on the right track.

In 1993, we formed the New Vision Civic League of East End. I served as president. I was having so much fun I didn't realize for how long, but I served for 23 years as our leader. We realized over 200 brand new homes and quite a few rehab homes. Most all of the homes on my street, except for maybe three or four, are brand new homes. And all of that has come about since 1993. When we started rebuilding the community, it was 85% blight. You see it now, how beautiful it is.

When I moved into the community, I knew everybody. Everyone knew me. We didn't have people coming in, robbing and breaking into homes. This type of thing is surfacing again, and I've been trying to form a neighborhood watch since the organization started in '93. But with people who are moving into the community, you can't even get them together long enough to explain to them what the needs are.

That's what I don't really like about my community right now. They have their own little group that they cater to, their own personal friends. But your friends ought to be my friends. I don't know whether that's selfishness on my part, but that's the way I came up.

They don't even lift up their hand and wave at you. You don't have to talk to me. You don't have to tell me nothing about your business. But acknowledge I'm here. I was here before you. That really hurts me.

That's their world. They are into each other. And they don't want to broaden their stand to let somebody else come in. ■



Mary White Thompson at home, Church Hill, 2018

Virginia P. Jackson

All of my life I have had love for people, love for children. And that's what I spent my life doing, doing for children, and doing for people. I grew up in the west end of Richmond on West Moore Street. When I was born, my mother and father were living on Leigh Street in the same area. He went his way, and we stayed on Moore Street. We were a very poor family, but we did not know we were poor. We were well fed. My grandmother could take a couple of cabbages — she had a big pot she cooked them in — and feed 13 people.

My mother was the worker of the family. Her sisters passed away as they were having babies, and my mother became the parent to four motherless and fatherless children. My mother also had two brothers. At times, they were out of jobs or couldn't find jobs, so my mother was really the worker and the keeper of a family of 13 or 14 relatives. She only had two children, but it was 13 of us living in a four-room house. My mother was the sole provider for all of us.

I was a great reader. I was reading even before I went to elementary school. It was just natural. I'd curl up in a big chair, and I would read novels sometimes almost all day long.

I married a fellow named Robert D. Jackson. We were singers and loved singing, particularly church music. That's where I met Bob. He was singing in a quartet. So we would go down to the radio station, WRTD, and sing, and our voices would be in the homes. We thought that was great.

My husband served overseas in the military and was injured. They were on a maneuver somewhere, and their ship crashed, but he was lucky enough to live. After he could travel, they brought him back to Virginia.

We stayed married for about five years. Times were hard. He went to New York to get a job because his friend told him there were some jobs available where he was working. We agreed that was what he should do. I had the two children; we went to the Broad

Street station and saw him off. When the train rolled off, my little senses spoke to me and said, "This is the end of this." We kept a good relationship because of my two children, but I didn't think we would be living together anymore.

I finished high school. I never worked in a home because I promised myself I wouldn't. My aunts used to work for some nice people, but they still had that segregated kind of mind. I accepted a job in D.C. with the federal government. I was a clerk in the Census Bureau. Sometimes at night I took college courses to further my education, but my mind was always focused on the growth of my children.

A lot has happened and changed in Richmond. And a whole lot of the change is because of the Model City program in the 1960s. Model City was a federal government-planned program. I was part of the policy board. The plan was done right there on the floor in my house. We worked for people who wanted to learn more but couldn't go to school, offering training as well as putting students back in school. It was a very good program, and I stayed with it a long time. Some projects are still going that were planned during the Model City.

The daycare development program was planned right here on this floor, too. My best friend, Bertha, and I were planning to do a daycare, so when I got involved with Model City, I handed our plan over to them for childcare. It included the family, the fathers, and everybody. We did training and workshops for them. The program turned out real well. People today remember Tiny Angels, and they remember me. We had a center in the North Side and two in the East End. We had them in what I call "all four corners." It was the first for many states. People from one or two countries came over to see our program, and we gave them our plan to take back with them.

I think the children of this generation came up without the kind of love we had coming up. We learned to love and not to hate. ■



Virginia P. Jackson and daughter Zenoria Abdus-Salaam at Mrs. Jackson's home, Church Hill, 2018

Zenoria Abdus-Salaam

I was born in Richmond at St. Philip Hospital because at the time that's where African American children were born. My first memories are of living on Moore Street, in what is called Newtowne West. My family has lived there for over 115 years, and I still have relatives there. My teachers also taught my mother and my grandmother.

I didn't have to go out of Newtowne for a thing, unless I wanted to. I could get clothes from the tailors and seamstresses in my community. We had stores, a pool hall, barber shop, beauty parlor, everything. The only reason we really went outside our community was to socialize with other communities. We took care of each other; if somebody didn't have food, they were going to eat.

My granny sent me to Thalhimers to pay her bill. I'm on the bus, and I see all my friends on the corner in this line. They said, "We're getting ready to have a march. Come on! Get in the line!" Now I'm supposed to be paying some bills. I'm in big trouble, but I got in that line.

SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference] would send people in to train us — James Farmer came with his daughter and Ms. Myrlie Evers and Ms. Rosa Parks. She taught me how to sew my first dress.

They kept telling us, "Okay, you know there's always a possibility you'll be locked up." And I was thinking, "Oh, my mom's going to kill me if I get locked up." We wore skirts, but we always had shorts on underneath. That was a two-fold thing: if you fall, you're not exposed. If you were locked up, the jail didn't give you a sheet or pillow or anything. So you pulled your skirt up around your head to keep the filth off, and you rolled your jeans down so that your legs would be covered, too. These were things they taught us, also

what kind of look to have on our faces. You weren't supposed to look like this was a joke because it wasn't a joke for us. It was life. So you had to be serious, stern.

I met a guy and married him; and I left Howard University, where I'd been a student. We went to Philadelphia to live. I went into the masjid, which they called "the temple," and the minister there was Jeremiah Shabazz. I listened to what he said about the things that were happening in our lives. I'd been in the civil rights movement, and so I knew what he said was real. So I'm thinking if he could do something to help our people, then maybe this is something I need to really listen to.

I became a great worker in the Nation of Islam. There were weeks when I cooked for 250 people. And I'm an ardent Muslim in my community now.

We all have to come to a point where we know that we are one humanity. God never said all this other stuff; we did. I guess God is tired, because it's really coming to a head. We have enjoyed the spoils of war here in America; we have all these worldly things. We have everything except, what? Humanity! Being a human is the easiest thing to do.

When I looked at the census, even though I had always known that my great-great-grandfather was a slave, when I saw "servant" beside his name, it just brought me to tears. Hearing it is one thing; seeing it on documents is something else again. That was a turning point in my life — to really know that yes, this was a real deal here in Richmond, Virginia. And it wasn't that long ago. The narratives always make it seem like it was a thousand years ago. It was not; it was yesterday. ■



First African Baptist Church, Richmond, Virginia, circa April 1865. This church housed several Freedmen's Bureau Schools. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Washington, DC

At the Vanguard of the Roots of Resistance and the Quest for Literacy in 19th-Century Richmond, Virginia

ELVATRICE BELSCHES, *Historian*

The roots of resistance and the quest for equality in civil rights Richmond can be found in myriad narratives chronicling the black experience in Richmond prior to 1900. Early social and fraternal organizations along with secret societies promoted a profound sense of collectivism and served as incubators for emerging black community leaders after the Civil War. The influence of the black church and the quest for literacy would provide an indelible blueprint for confronting inequalities in 20th-century Richmond.

In the late 1700s to early 1800s, the minister Peter Hawkins was also known as the “City Tooth-drawer” in Richmond. Chronicled in Samuel Mordecai’s 1856 book, *Richmond in By-gone Days; being Reminiscences of an Old Citizen*, Hawkins was occasionally contracted to provide medical care to enslaved people, and his standing in the community can be confirmed by way of several court records.¹ He once sued a white client for non-payment after treating an enslaved person. And, at one point, Hawkins purchased his wife and infant daughter in order to grant them their freedom. Hawkins was more than likely literate, and his desire to assure the literacy of his children can be found in his will, where he directed that money be set aside for their education.

Throughout the 1800s, the church played a pivotal role in introducing free and enslaved blacks to the rudiments of education. Documented instances of literary training can be found within the history of

Richmond’s First Baptist Church. At this integrated church pastored by whites, William Crane, a white merchant from New Jersey and his brother, James Crane, taught black parishioners reading, writing, and the Bible in classes that met three times a week prior to 1816. Among their students were Lott Cary and Colin Teague, two of the first black Christian missionaries to travel to Africa.²

The sheer number of black parishioners versus white worshippers led to an inability to tend to the religious needs of the former. Perhaps emboldened by their literacy, nearly 100 free blacks signed a petition requesting that the Virginia legislature allow them to build a freestanding African Baptist Church in Richmond in 1823.³ The petition was denied. But with black members of First Baptist Church outnumbering whites by almost 4 to 1 by 1839, the sheer number of parishioners perhaps provided the impetus for the actual split in 1841, which resulted in the organization of First African Baptist Church. First African Baptist Church, Second African (1846), and Ebenezer Baptist Church (1858) established black congregations that were, by law, governed and pastored by white pastors and trustees until after the Civil War.

Although the advent of these institutions granted some autonomy, free and enslaved blacks were simultaneously impacted by the increasingly restrictive laws enacted in response to noted revolts such as Gabriel’s Rebellion in 1800, the Denmark Vesey Affair in South Carolina in 1822, and Nat Turner’s Rebellion in 1831. Opportunities



Panoramic view of the campus, Virginia Union University, Richmond, circa 1909. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Washington, DC

to receive instruction in reading and writing were curtailed in 1819 by a revised Virginia law that banned such instruction for both enslaved and free blacks in groups. During this period, however, free and enslaved blacks in Richmond belonged to secret fraternal organizations, several of which provided benefits for the ill and upon death. Although forbidden to meet in groups without a white person present, organizations such as the Burying Ground Society of the Free People of Color of the City of Richmond, founded circa 1815, continued to meet and record orderly bylaws and meeting minutes as evidenced in extant minutes from the 1840s.

One of the members of the Burying Ground Society of the Free People of Color of the City of Richmond was George Washington Ruffin, a free black barber and trained musician. Ruffin and his free-born wife, Nancy Ruffin, employed tutors to instruct their children in the classics, Latin, and English Literature.⁴ In 1853, Nancy Ruffin and their eight children relocated to Boston to enhance their educational opportunities. George Lewis Ruffin, the eldest child of the Ruffins, would go on to make history in several instances. After

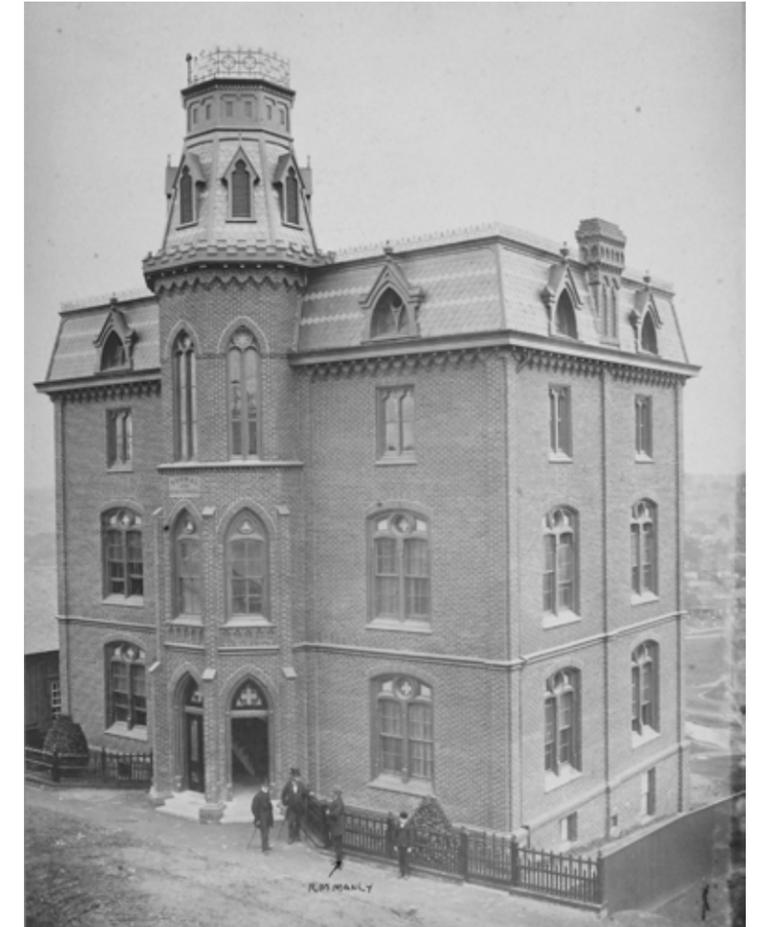
matriculating through Boston's public schools, he later entered Harvard University's law school, graduating in 1869. Ruffin became not only the first known black graduate of Harvard Law School, but also the first black person elected to Boston's City Council and the first black person to be appointed a judge in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The fall of Richmond on April 3, 1865, and the subsequent end of the Civil War emboldened many Richmonders to elevate their social activism by participating in the emerging educational opportunities afforded by the Freedmen's Bureau and other philanthropic organizations from the Union states. The fervent hope of many blacks after the end of the war was tempered by daily outrages inflicted on them by whites, including false imprisonments. In addition, blacks were forced to carry identifying passes. Rather than acquiescing to these horrid conditions, several black community leaders met in Richmond to address an overflow crowd, estimated by some accounts to be 3,000 people, at First African Baptist Church to voice their demands.

The ability to elect black pastors was of major importance. Among the group of community leaders were the Rev. Richard Wells, pastor of Manchester Baptist Church and later Ebenezer Baptist Church; Fields Cook, a respected community leader and minister; Peter H. Woolfolk, a literate man who would teach in the Freedmen's Bureau Schools in Richmond and later co-found, edit, and publish the *Virginia Star* newspaper; and Thomas Morris Chester, perhaps the only black war correspondent during the last months of the Civil War, who wrote for a major daily newspaper, *The Philadelphia Press*. Five of these leaders traveled to the White House to share their grievances personally with President Andrew Johnson and, as a result, major changes were implemented and the pass system was discontinued.⁵

The Freedmen's Bureau schools, which opened shortly after the end of the Civil War in Richmond, would produce future educators and trailblazers whose impact would be felt for decades to come. Again, the black church's role was pivotal in the education of the freedmen as several of the earliest Bureau Schools were organized in the city's black churches that were founded before the Civil War. Perhaps one of the most powerful illustrations of blacks' desire for education was chronicled by Lucy and Sarah Chase, two white sisters and educators. Sent to Richmond by the New England Freedmen's Aid Society, Lucy Chase wrote in April 1865 that when they arrived to start the school at First African Baptist Church, they were greeted by more than 1,000 children and 75 adults.⁶

One of the most prominent secondary schools founded under the Bureau was the Richmond Colored Normal and High School. More commonly referred to as Colored Normal, this school was organized in 1867 and specialized in training black students to become educators. Among its alumni were many activists and leaders who would become nationally known. Its graduates included



Richmond Colored Normal and High School (commonly referred to as Colored Normal), circa 1870s. Courtesy of the Richmond Public Library

Maggie L. Walker, a trailblazing woman banker and leader of one of the most prominent fraternal organizations among blacks in America in the early 20th century; Dr. Sarah G. Jones, M.D., the first female native of Virginia to pass its medical boards and receive a license from the Commonwealth to practice medicine; and John Mitchell Jr., a fraternal leader, a bank founder, and the long-time

editor and proprietor of the *Richmond Planet* newspaper. From the pages of the *Planet*, Mitchell argued vehemently for a national anti-lynching bill and served as a major voice in addressing local and national inequality.



The first graduates of the Normal Department of Hartshorn Memorial College, Richmond, Virginia, circa 1885. Courtesy of Virginia Union University Archives, Richmond

The blueprint for the resistance to segregation during the civil rights era in Richmond can be connected by way of the influence of the black church and collectivism through various organizations and institutions of higher education, such as Virginia Union and Hartshorn Memorial College, a college founded for black women. As a result, the forerunner of Virginia Union University was founded in 1865 to give newly emancipated slaves an opportunity for education and advancement. The University is the result of the 1899 merger of two institutions: Richmond Theological Seminary and Wayland Seminary, and later, Hartshorn Memorial College, and Storer College, originally of Harper's Ferry, West Virginia.

The collectivism, reverence for education, and the seeds for social activism demonstrated in Richmond during the civil rights era are firmly rooted in the activities of 19th-century forebears. Perhaps the words of William Roscoe Davis, an orator and formerly enslaved black minister and community leader in Hampton Roads during and

after the Civil War, truly encapsulate the understanding of the power of education when he stated, in part:

“All we want is cultivation. What would the best soil produce without cultivation? We want to get wisdom. That is all we need. Let us get that, and we are made for time and eternity.”⁷ ■

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Brian Palmer, *Untitled* [8 May 2018, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Richmond, Virginia; founded 1857], archival inkjet print on paper, 26.7 x 40 inches, lent courtesy of the artist



Brian Palmer, *Untitled* [4 April 2015, Virginia State Capitol, Richmond], archival inkjet print on paper, 26.7 x 40 inches, lent courtesy of the artist

In Richmond, the Legacy of 1970 Casts a Shadow Over Our Civil Rights Movement

MICHAEL PAUL WILLIAMS

Columnist, Richmond Times-Dispatch

If Richmond was a battleground of the civil rights movement during my early 1960s childhood, the battle was hardly pitched.

The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. was no stranger to Richmond, and he recruited the Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker of Petersburg to serve as his chief of staff. But Richmond took a backseat to Montgomery, Greensboro, Birmingham, and Selma as hallowed and harrowed backdrops of the struggle. The urban unrest that peppered the 60s in places such as Harlem, Watts, Newark, and Detroit largely passed over Richmond, a town where order and a decorous oppression presided.

As I entered adolescence, in the aftermath of King's assassination, the national civil rights movement entered its early stages of decline. But in Richmond, it seemed like the turmoil was just starting. By this time, I had shed my Negro facade in favor of unabashed blackness, even though I didn't entirely understand the racial tensions swirling around me and my hometown. It was only decades later, as a newspaper columnist in my hometown, that I'd conclude that Richmond is less informed by the landmark civil rights events of the 50s and 60s than by circumstances arising from a pivotal year in the ensuing decade.

To understand today's Richmond — a city whose resurgence is weighed down by unrealized dreams and enduring inequities — one must carefully examine 1970. For better and for worse, events of

that year were a catalyst that shaped Richmond's current political, educational, and economic terrain.

Which is not to suggest that Richmond, prior to that year, was dormant during the black struggle for equal rights. In 1956, around the time of the King-led Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott, the Richmond Crusade for Voters was founded to promote voter registration and counter Virginia's Massive Resistance to school desegregation, as ordered by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. But the fruits of those nascent black voter mobilization efforts, which culminated with the election of Richmond's first black mayor in 1977 and the nation's first elected black governor in 1989, would not be immediately evident.

Richmond had other seminal moments. On Feb. 22, 1960, 34 Virginia Union University students staged a sit-in at the segregated dining facilities of the Thalhimers department store in downtown Richmond, as part of a wave of lunch-counter protests that had begun in Greensboro, North Carolina, several weeks earlier.

That following September, Gloria Jean Mead, 13, and Carol Irene Swann, 12, became the first black students to enroll in a historically white Richmond Public School, Chandler Junior High.

Eight years later, in April 1968, the rioting was relatively mild in Richmond following King's assassination. The real storm — the

kind that leaves a permanent mark on a community — arrived two years later.

1970 saw two transformative events in Richmond that placed Virginia’s capital city at a crossroads: court-ordered busing to increase beyond a trickle the flow of school desegregation, and the city’s annexation of 23 square miles of Chesterfield County. The outcome of both of these events is still keenly felt, adding to Richmond’s accumulation of unhealed scar tissue.

U.S. District Judge Robert R. Merhige Jr. ordered cross-busing in 1970, triggering a considerable exodus of white Richmond residents to the surrounding counties. Two years later, when the futility of desegregating a re-segregating, majority-black school district became evident, Merhige ordered the consolidation of Richmond Public Schools with the school districts of neighboring Henrico and Chesterfield counties. Court-ordered busing to achieve integration produced a round of revulsion among the area’s white residents and sparked a new chapter of massive resistance. Merhige’s dog was shot to death and his guest house burned down. A caravan of cars traveled to Washington, D.C. in protest, many bearing bumper stickers with “S.O.S.” — the acronym for “Save Our Schools.”

Then-Governor Linwood Holton, the first Republican to be elected governor of Virginia in the 20th century, defied the expectations of white Southern political leaders by enrolling his children in predominantly black public schools, a personal act of compliance to federal law in stark contrast to Virginia’s ongoing resistance to racial integration. When he accompanied his daughter Tayloe to John F. Kennedy High School on August 31, 1970, the moment was captured in an iconic *The New York Times* photograph. The image suggested a new day in Virginia. And indeed, Douglas Wilder, nearly

two decades later, would add a punctuation mark to that notion with his election as governor. But Richmond’s infrastructure of inequality, which was cemented by biased federal housing policies, lending institution redlining, decaying public housing, and highway construction through black neighborhoods, remains largely intact.

That truth is vividly evident in the Richmond Public School district, which, if anything, is more separate and unequal today than it was when Merhige issued his court order. Merhige clearly foresaw this outcome when he attempted to consolidate the city school district with those of the surrounding counties. But that consolidation plan failed on a 4-4 vote of the Supreme Court after Associate Justice Lewis F. Powell Jr., a former chairman of the Richmond School Board, recused himself.

The current deteriorated condition of Richmond’s school buildings from disinvestment and lack of maintenance is an embarrassment. Academic underperformance has defied long-term remedies. The glimmer of hope represented by rising test scores at Carver Elementary School proved illusory, as that school was brought down in 2018 by a standardized test-cheating scandal involving its then-principal and select teachers. The majority of the district’s students are impoverished, a situation whose roots date back to the aforementioned suburban flight not only of white residents, but also of black residents with the means.

Some individuals argue that the state of the city’s schools represents the civil rights crisis of our day. One thing is certain: Richmond’s resurgence, which has seen the city’s population grow from fewer than 190,000 residents in 1996 to more than 227,000 in 2018, is tenuous as long as the city’s schools are viewed as a liability by parents of school-age children. In Richmond, educational equity

has become a mantra.

If the abandonment of Richmond’s public schools in the face of integration hobbled the city on one front, its racially motivated annexation of Chesterfield proved destructive on another. The annexation was carried out in a clandestine deal in which the city paid Chesterfield \$27.2 million for 23 acres of the county. But the transaction was less about securing new land to expand the city’s tax base than about procuring white voters to preserve white political power in Richmond. Activist Curtis Holt filed a federal lawsuit alleging that the annexation violated the Voting Rights Act, a piece of 1965 legislation purchased with the blood of civil rights marchers in Selma, Alabama.

Richmond elections were suspended from 1970 to 1977, with future Congressman Thomas J. Bliley Jr. remaining mayor throughout, before the courts concluded that the intent of the annexation was to dilute the city’s black vote. As a result, Richmond was compelled to move from what had been an at-large method of electing council members to the current ward system. Five of the resulting voter wards were majority-black and elected African American council members, who picked Henry L. Marsh III as Richmond’s first black mayor.

“Not only did the annexation ultimately fail to stave off black political hegemony; it set in motion state legislative measures that would permanently prevent Richmond from expanding its land mass in the future. Richmond’s merger with Chesterfield County had consequences for the future of annexation law in Virginia and the commonwealth’s constitution,” writes Julian Maxwell Hayter in *The Dream is Lost: Voting Rights and the Politics of Race in Richmond, Virginia*.¹ The merger was the impetus for legislative actions that would effectively grind to a halt future annexations in Virginia. The

result would render Richmond what it is today — landlocked and isolated, with a stunted tax base.

“If antiannexationists found their first ally in Curtis Holt, antiurbanism eventually crept into the General Assembly,” writes Hayter, an associate professor of leadership studies at the University of Richmond. “By the early 1970s, unparalleled white flight from Virginia’s cities eventually gave rise to greater county and suburban representation in state government. The commonwealth’s lawmakers responded to the flood of annexation suits during the 1960s by imposing a moratorium on new annexations for cities with populations larger than 125,000.”² That moratorium “was effectively permanent, due to the underlying racial politics of the action,” observes Benjamin Campbell in *Richmond’s Unhealed History*. “It is still in effect. Although it was couched in terms that made it seem general. . . in practice, it applied only to Richmond, a fact of which legislators were fully cognizant.”³ Indeed, Richmond’s surrounding counties were granted immunity from annexation.

The state’s constriction of the city expresses itself in ways other than curtailed expansion; it even limits what Richmond can do with city-owned property *within* the city limits. This powerlessness plays out in the city’s apparent inability to remove its Confederate monuments, even if it could summon the political will and popular support to do so. The memorials to the Lost Cause, protected by a state law governing war memorials, loom as towering symbols of the limits of black political power in the former capital of the Confederacy and of the chokehold the legislature retains on aspects of Richmond’s home rule. But those limits go beyond symbolism. Richmond’s power structure remains overwhelmingly dominated by its corporate community, and little of significance happens without their imprimatur.

At a critical juncture, Richmond resisted racial progress, got bogged down in protracted lawsuits, and became mired in racial factionalism. New South cities that navigated this era with fewer bumps, such as Charlotte, Raleigh, and Nashville, gained momentum as Richmond stalled. A city with enormous natural gifts—a rich history, lovely river setting, strategic location, and hefty corporate base—squandered its advantages with intransigence and infighting.

Even amid its 21st-century resurgence, Richmond faces intractable problems, and it remains haunted by choices made nearly five decades ago. Its civil rights movement remains impeded by the law of unintended consequences. ■

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Yvonne A. Mimms-Evans

I grew up down the street from George Wythe High School. I had five sisters and one brother, and a mother and a father who stayed on top of us. They didn't let us get away with anything. They read us like a book.

Richmond was segregated; I remember 'whites only' signs. I belong to First Baptist of South Richmond, and I've been going there since I was in my mother's womb. When we would leave church on Sundays, we'd go to the Peoples Drug Store because they had a stand where sodas were sold. We would buy food, but we couldn't eat it at the counter; we had to take it outside of the store to eat it.

In elementary and middle school, I had a physical education teacher who loved me and a girlfriend of mine. She took us under her wing and taught us how to play tennis. She would have us over at her home and cook for us. When I went to high school, the physical education teacher there was also one of my favorite teachers.

I love my kids in every school I've ever worked in, but George Wythe was special. It was the first place I worked after I graduated from college. The principal at George Wythe called and asked if I would come teach health and physical education.

I can't remember who sponsored the cheerleading squad when I got there, but it was basically lily white. The school had always been that way. When I arrived, I said, "This school's population is changing; things have to change." I had some really good black girls try out, and we chose some of them for the squad. It was a fantastic squad. I would have them over to my house and cook for them, and we'd have parties. Oh, they just loved it.

I just had good girls. They learned the cheers and the movements, the stunts and everything. I would just stand there and watch

them; if I saw them doing something I did not feel was appropriate, I would stop it. I think they admired that about me. I wasn't going to let them do booty shakes and that kind of thing. That was not representative of our school.

Once you integrated, then people had a tendency to back off and go with the kind that they were accustomed to. That started that basic all-black thing, so I had to let them know, "You've got to integrate this squad because that's what the *times* are demanding." And it happened.

I remember the kids interacting with one another, liking one another, and probably seeing something they had not experienced in the past. Blacks beginning to like the white kids, whites beginning to like the black kids. The integration that occurred at George Wythe High School was good.

But a lot of bitterness is going on in this country now and in these communities. So I'm not real sure that integration did anything but cause more problems. I don't think people have taken the time to understand what has really taken place. Kids have grown up with that bitterness, which is not helping the situation at all.

A lot of people today cannot forget what they were taught by their parents. Just like I haven't forgotten what my parents taught me. Those people haven't died out who came up during that time. And they're still teaching their children what their parents taught them. So there are a lot of people who've really accepted integration, and they're getting along just fine. But you still have a lot of people who are living in the past. Some people cannot see the worth that someone has if they don't look like them. What sense does that make? None. And that's the way I taught my children. I may look different from you, but I have a value system, and I have a lot to offer. ■



Yvonne A. Mimms-Evans, First Baptist of South Richmond, 2017

Valerie R. Perkins

I grew up in Southside Richmond. My mother was a domestic worker until my last year in high school, and my father was an auto mechanic. My mom was a bit of a tomboy. She played basketball in high school. So all the community kids were really anxious when she got home from work because they wanted her to throw a football with them. My mom would take some of the community kids with us to the beach or bowling. She played softball so we would go to softball games and to Southside Speedway to watch the races. She took us places and exposed us to a lot. I just can't understand how she did it, knowing the kind of work she did. You're cleaning somebody else's house and raising somebody else's kids, and then you've got to come home and do the same thing at your house. But she always made it an exciting time. It was wonderful.

I went to Franklin Elementary School and to junior high school at Blackwell. This was decided according to your zip code. It was predominantly black. You might have had four or five white students, but not many more than that. Blackwell was an interesting experience because it brought blacks from uptown and downtown together. Anybody that lived on the other side of the railroad track was considered to live downtown.

I was looking forward to going to Armstrong High. My mom went to Armstrong, and my brother was there. I was very, very excited about it because the Armstrong-Walker Football Classic was a big event. But I was ordered to go to George Wythe in 1970. I was really disappointed, but I had no choice. And so I went to George Wythe as I was ordered to do.

During that first year, there was a fight every day. Blacks and whites. I'd never been exposed to this, so it was traumatic for me. Often, I was like, "I don't really want to go to school because, you know, somebody's going to get in a fight, and I don't want to get hit or hurt. I don't want to be anywhere around that." That was my first year. You could cut the tension with a knife. I was focused on getting from one class to another, just getting through the day and

not being anywhere near any kind of disturbance or argument. It was disruptive.

It was so scary, too, because your core friends who you're used to being around — your support system — were not there. Even now, when I talk about it, I feel the fear that I felt back then, that first year.

My second year, I tried out for the cheerleading squad and made it. The integrated cheering squad was a driving force for me once I joined. It was my way of attaching to a group of people, a group of allies because all of my other friends were not there. I had support and friendship, and I wasn't just out there by myself. Maybe that's why it got better.

I don't know if I would've had this same opportunity had I gone to Armstrong. The cheerleading squad provided me with an opportunity to get to know different people from different backgrounds, which was a wonderful experience. We were open with each other about culture and diversity. It gave me my first steps towards leadership to become the person that I am today. I'm a senior management analyst for the federal government now. I work for the Treasury. I think about my experiences as I've been educated and the work world where, in a lot of my early experiences, I was maybe the only black in the room.

Good leadership for me was Yvonne Mimms, our cheerleading sponsor. She wanted everybody to have a voice. She saw something in me to promote me from a cheerleader to co-captain to captain. Being identified as a leader was a big turning point for me. We're still friends.

I came back to Richmond 21 years ago. I wanted my daughter to know my mother, not from afar. This was the catalyst for coming back. When I first did, I told Ms. Mimms how much she meant to me and what she did for me. At the time, it just seemed natural. But when I look back over it, that was a turning point in my life. ■



Valerie R. Perkins, George Wythe High School, 2018

Mark Person

All the bands from the Woodstock era would come play at the Arena in Richmond, which is now the Sports Backers Stadium — Santana, Sly and the Family Stone. So it was a great era for music; but if you listen to the words, there's a lot of conflict in these songs. I remember in the seventh grade a bus trip to D.C. was cancelled because of the civil rights protests there; people were flipping buses. It was an eye-opener. You started seeing a lot of anxiousness, tension in the air.

We had friends that we knew from playing together in the neighborhood. As we got older, some of these friends moved out of the city. When I asked why they were moving, they said they didn't want to go to the public schools. That kind of bothered me. My father had his own business on Hull Street, and we always had black friends. That's just the way I was brought up. Busing caused quite a transition. When I was in the eighth grade, it was maybe 95% white. All the kids from the area were all of a sudden going to the very good private schools. For me, it was just a matter of adjusting and getting to meet new friends.

After the eighth grade it was the last day of school: I still replay it in my mind. I'm with Elizabeth Salim's brother, David, and we're just leaving George Wythe. As we're walking, we hear a little rustle in the bushes, and we were surrounded by several guys. One guy said, "Give me all your money." As I'm reaching down and look up, I get hit near my left eye. David had a concussion and was banged up. The day after it happened, the police came, which was a little intimidating. We knew one of the assailants; he'd been in a class with us.

Next thing, we're in court. It's in the newspapers on the front page; people are calling the house. At that time, there was a lot of attention on the school system to see if busing was working.

We pressed charges, and our parents asked if we wanted to leave Wythe, and we said, "No, we're not going to leave." I remember my father, a tough World War II vet, said, "You'll be alright, just put a Band-aid on it." We both got some threats, but we stuck it out. When people came up to me in the classroom, I said, "I'm the victim of this, and it's not a racial thing, but I've got my rights, too. I have as much right to be sitting in the classroom as anyone." I just looked at it as, hey, put it behind you, you had a bad day. When I graduated from George Wythe in 1974, I had not missed a day of high school.

I played in the school band. In the eighth grade, we played John Philip Sousa and the next year, we played the Temptations and some good rhythm and blues. Sports was also my haven. I still play softball; I'm the old man on the team. We want to get some of the Wythe students involved and have an alumni tournament and give money back to the athletic department.

My family has a little old country church, Person United Methodist Church, down in Southampton County. I try to stay active and go down two or three times a month. Nat Turner was baptized in the millpond behind the church. I've heard several of the elders say a white dove appeared from the skies and landed on Nat Turner's head when he was baptized.

Nat Turner had a Bible about the size of the palm of your hand that he carried around in his back pocket. In 1831, after leading the slave rebellion, he was hanged in Jerusalem, the county seat, and the Bible stayed in the jail there. In 1910, my cousin, Morris, and his father, Walter, were given Nat Turner's Bible. Over one hundred years later, the family decided that the Bible was going to the Smithsonian, to the new National Museum of African American History and Culture. We think Nat Turner would have wanted it there. ■



Mark Person, Westover Hills Elementary School, 2017

Elizabeth Salim

I was one of those kids who couldn't wait to grow up, so going to high school was very exciting. The summer of my eighth-grade year, Judge Merhige decided that kids in my neighborhood would go to Bainbridge Junior High to integrate the schools. My parents were very upset about it. Everybody was talking about it.

Busing was what really changed everything for me, and made me more aware of the greater community. As a result of the busing mandate, a private school named James River Academy cropped up out here at the same time. It was very orderly, a very rigorous education. But as an eighth grader, I didn't really want two hours of homework a night. I really begged my parents to let me go to George Wythe High School, and so they agreed. Of course, the environment there was so different.

The first day I walked into Wythe, I was very nervous because the whole atmosphere was different from anything I had experienced before. It was very chaotic, very distracting, intimidating. I walked up to my locker and couldn't get it open. This big black guy — very muscular, very dark — came up and stood beside me, which was intimidating to me. And he asked, "Are you having trouble with your locker?" I said, "yes," and he said, "Let me help you." And then he said, "You're David's sister, aren't you?" When I said "Yes," he said, "I play baseball with him." He and I became good friends after that.

You had people who wanted to get along on both sides. And you had people who didn't, who were determined not to. And you had people who just wanted to get an education and didn't care what was going on around them. They didn't want to be a part of the school. They just came, did their work, and went home.

When I was thinking about going to a white school, my dream was to be a cheerleader. But then, when I ended up going to a black school, I recognized that most of the black schools had black cheerleading squads. I loved our leader, Mrs. Mimms. When we had try-outs, I didn't think I was very prepared, but I guess she saw something in me and in the other white girls she chose. The squad was half-and-half, which I know made the black girls who had wanted to get on really mad.

To be able to get along with somebody that was so different from you — I loved that. Or to overcome the obstacle of starting off badly. There were relationships that began very badly. But then to find the commonality and become friends — to me, that was huge. I think it helped me overcome being intimidated by other people who were different from me.

If I was friends with a black person, and we were going to go out somewhere and walk together, we knew that we were going to be stared at, and comments would be made. I had to make the decision that this was okay.

I married an Arab man from Israel. When I would go to Israel, I felt that it was easy to fit in. Without the experience at George Wythe, it would have been a lot harder. When my husband's parents moved to a Jewish area of Nazareth, he met people there and wanted to go to school with his friends, so they allowed him to go to a Jewish high school. We experienced the same thing: going to a high school where we were the minority and had to learn how to move in both cultures. ■



Elizabeth Salim, Forest Hill Park, 2018

Rebecca S. Wooden

I'm the youngest in a family of six children, three boys and three girls. We didn't have a lot of money. My father's parents even lived with us for a while; I grew to be very close to my grandparents. My parents separated, and they never divorced until my father died. It was a very, very good family, but things changed when they split.

I do remember being poor because we ate stuff like flour cakes, where you just mix flour and water, and you put it in the pan; it's almost like a pancake. My mother did not complete high school. If she had, she would have been what I am today—a counselor—because she's a great listener and problem-solver. But she was a domestic.

I liked to draw when I was a little girl. I must've been about seven when I drew an octopus that went on display at Thalhimers, I think. I remember my mom couldn't take me there because blacks weren't allowed in stores like Thalhimers and Miller & Rhoads. I wanted to see my drawing on display, but she said we couldn't go there.

When desegregation started, I went to Kennedy High School. It was a fairly new school. Governor Holton's daughter went there. She was like anybody else, but it was fantastic to see her and all of her entourage, with the governor bringing her to school. I felt good. I was on the cheering squad there and active in a lot of clubs.

I was in trigonometry, calculus, physics. I kept thinking, "How do they think I'm supposed to do this?" My guidance counselor kept saying, "You can do it." I looked up to my counselor and most of my teachers as role models.

I chose to go to VCU. I didn't want to go to a historically black college because I'd been in a historically black situation my whole life. I am the first in my family to graduate from college. My mother was adamant about all of her children finishing school.

We had house parties, and everybody was sitting around having a good time. We enjoyed our time together. No violence. Everybody came to have fun, and everybody was laughing. You had your Afro, your music, your wide bellbottoms, your platform shoes.

In '73, we all wore big Afros; all of us were into this Black Pride thing. I think it did raise self-esteem a lot. It made you feel like there's nothing you can't do. I think that's what's missing with a lot of people today. There doesn't seem to be much pride in your race. There's too much of pulling each other down, instead of helping each other. If you had the pride, then you would be proud of who you are. And proud of the next person as well. We got this message: Good, better, best. Never let it rest. Tell the good, best is better and the better best. ■



Rebecca S. Wooden, Eastminster Presbyterian Church, 2017

Tab Mines

I grew up in a very close-knit family. All the generations stayed very active within the household. My grandmother, her three siblings, two sisters, and a son, his wife, his two kids, and my mother's sister's daughter all lived in the same household while I attended elementary school.

We look at immigrants and foreigners very strangely because they usually have more than one family unit in the house. But that's the way our community grew up. We all had different family units in the same house at the time, and we were very happy with that. I learned the most from the seniors who were in my family and the elders nearby. I'm living now in my mother and her sister's first house, which they worked so hard for.

I didn't really get to know my father until I was on my way to college and, at that point, I found out I had a brother. My father and I are very close today. My brother and I didn't know each other growing up at all, but our inner spirit is the same. Everybody who meets him and knows me says the same thing.

In the black community, kids were protected from mostly everything because that's the way we were brought up. All you had to do was just have fun and go to school. It was not uncommon to hear from a teacher, "I've taught everybody in your family." School was something you looked forward to. The teachers would discuss with the kids examples of life history and situations that you wouldn't get in a textbook. And so you learned a lot about decision-making, what's right and wrong, and compassion for others.

It was during this time that a lot of capital projects were displacing black communities — the downtown expressway went straight through the heart of the black community. We moved to the Swansboro neighborhood because my cousin Robin was right down the street. Her dad and mother and her mother's mother

moved next door. The Klan burned a cross in their yard, and they shot through the window of Robin's bedroom. FBI agents stayed at the house for a while. It was a really scary time.

George Wythe High School was a culture shock for me. I would be the only black person in the classroom. I was always the kid who liked to connect with the teacher, and I couldn't connect with the teachers there.

No one wanted to be at that school. We were going into the ninth grade and thought we all would be going to one of the black high schools that our parents went to. We had allegiance to those black schools all our lives. It was tradition.

As I started playing more and more sports, I developed my social skills, too. Being in sports meant I became friends with a lot of white kids. We all developed this close-knit family. Coach Robert Booker made us think that the south of the city needed some strengthening and coming together, and that we needed to win some championships to show everybody else there's talent over on this side of the city. His spirit and the way he approached things caused the whole community to support the school.

Sports was a vehicle for most of the black males to excel and express themselves. We had a very robust, active recreation-and-parks department. Most of the guys who played sports went away, but they came back and worked for the city during the summertime. We always looked up to them as role models and had something to look forward to when they came back. You tried to achieve just as much as they did. There was a meeting place for everybody in the community, which kept the community grounded. When they stopped funding the recreation-and-parks program, it was devastating for the kids in the inner city. We didn't have any politicians willing to stand up for us. ■



Tab Mines, Brook's Diner, 2018

Rev. Robin D. Mines

All of my family's roots — my mom, dad, grandparents — are in Richmond. When I was born in 1958, right at the beginning of the civil rights era, we had a home on Southside, where we lived with my mom's parents on Midlothian Turnpike. I had a really close-knit family, a lot of relatives in the city, and a Christian upbringing in a pretty strict environment.

Around age five or six, after President Kennedy was assassinated, I started realizing racism existed in the city. Lyndon Johnson ran against Barry Goldwater, and that's when a lot of people got really nasty.

Klan attacks occurred in my community when my family relocated from Midlothian Turnpike to what is now the Swansboro neighborhood, after annexation when the county line moved. We were unwelcome in the neighborhood. There were cross-burnings and shootings. After only two weeks in our new home, our house was completely shot up — shotgun blasts all over the front yard, windows shot out, the aluminum siding, a whole section of the house was just bullet holes everywhere.

My parents tried to protect us as best they could. You know, transporting us wherever they could and always having an adult with us. Putting us in the back of the house to sleep, that sort of thing. My parents told me it's not an entire race that's like this; there are a few hateful, ignorant people, and we just have to be careful.

Martin Luther King was assassinated towards the end of my time in elementary school. I think a lot of people gave up hope. It really deflated the community. It was like, oh my God, if they murder Dr. King, where does that leave us?

I went to a segregated school up until it was time to go to seventh grade in 1970. My first year at Elkhardt Middle School was a horrible experience. All the black kids from my neighborhood

and the surrounding neighborhoods were put on a couple of city buses, packed like sardines, not even standing room left. We were bused out of our neighborhoods to integrate other schools. We were all afraid of violence because of the hatred. I can't speak for other kids, but I know I was afraid because I didn't think I was going to measure up in the classroom because we had this stigma of thinking that white kids were smarter than us. I had an English teacher who said some hateful things, which caused you to shut down. During that whole period, I barely hung on. I don't think much learning went on. I don't think a lot of us thought we'd live to be adults.

After going through what we'd gone through, my grades crashed. By the time I got to George Wythe High School, I had pretty low self-esteem. But when I got to high school, the atmosphere was a little different, and things started looking up for me. I was in the marching band and played three sports. I was in the drama club and on the yearbook staff. I was elected vice president of my senior class. I had a mixture of friends of different races.

I was raised by a marine, so my mentality was a little bit different from some of the kids in my community. Then joining the Air Force helped build my confidence. I got to see the world and meet so many different people from different places. And I learned so much about myself. I realized I can do anything.

Recently we were talking about this 'stand your ground' issue with Trayvon Martin. I still have anxiety today if I see two white men in a pickup truck with a Confederate flag. But I'm not going to freak out and get a gun and say, "Well, I better kill them before they kill me."

A lot of people don't take the time that they need to process what they went through as far as racial violence or any other issues they experienced — releasing the past and really seeing it for what it was and overcoming it. ■



Rev. Robin D. Mines at home, Manchester, 2018

Philip H. Brunson III

I grew up in Southside Richmond, the oldest of five. My mother and father met at Armstrong High School. My mother went on to St. Philip School of Nursing. My father went to Virginia Union University, where he became the director of financial aid and placement until he passed away. His obligation was to see that those kids got an education and jobs. He's my biggest role model.

My mom would work at nighttime, eleven to seven. Dad would work during the daytime. So there was always somebody available if the kids needed some assistance.

My father, seeing the thumb down on the black race for so long, felt obliged to see that black people were elevated to a different level, and he was in a position to do something about it. My mother was more into seeing that we had the same privileges and opportunities as white kids. That's why they would reach out to try and find whatever programs they could for the underprivileged.

My father was president of the civic association in the neighborhood. My mother got involved in RCAP [Richmond Community Action Program], so we had a lot of activities. We would go to campgrounds and things of that nature. They even had tutoring for kids. They also tried to get the city to put facilities in the Southside area for the kids, so we wouldn't have to go so far away. My parents and RCAP tried to get a YMCA over here in Southside. They promised us a YMCA but they put it far south in Chesterfield, and we still did not have access to it. So they duped us on that one.

It seemed like the whole George Wythe High School basketball team played in my backyard. We all lived within blocks of each other. Most of us in the neighborhood were in the Boy Scouts as well. Somebody's father would buy a tent, put it up in the

backyard, and we'd spend the weekend at his house in the backyard tent.

My first year at Wythe — the fall of 1969 — there were so few blacks, you could count us in the hallway. By the fall of '70, the school had changed over to 85% black. I can remember the police coming up to control fights. But between my sophomore and junior year, things really mellowed out.

I would look through my father's photo albums. He was a sergeant in charge of an artillery unit in Korea. Seeing his pictures sparked my interest in the military, and I joined ROTC when I got into Wythe. I really excelled at it. I can remember one medal I got from the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Being black, you say, "Confederate? Why am I getting this?" Just mind-boggling, but I was glad to get it.

When Martin Luther King was shot, there were race riots and fights. I can remember being on Hull Street at the old Manchester Bridge. On the south end of it was the Confederate Angels headquarters. This was a biker gang. At some point, the police department made a raid and found homemade bombs. I happened to be on Bainbridge Street when the Confederate Angels were going up and down the street during one of the race riots, actually beating people with chains.

I was a police officer for 26 years, a detective for 18 years. I was in the street crime unit working a robbery-shooting in Oregon Hill, in one of the little neighborhood bars. Three of us responded to the shooting, and we were all black. The guy who was shot was white. I said, "Hey, who did this, what happened?" He said, "Get these niggers away from me." I'm there to help him. The ambulance attendants who came to help stop him bleeding were black. What are you going to do? ■



Philip H. Brunson III, Allix B. James Chapel, Coburn Hall, Virginia Union University, 2017

Carol Y. Wray

I'm a preacher's kid. My dad was a Methodist preacher in Virginia. My grandfather was a Methodist preacher, and my son is a Methodist preacher. When I was in second grade, in 1964, my father, as a pastor of a small rural area in the Blue Ridge mountains, supported the integration of schools. The KKK came after us, and they tormented us. Their kids tormented me at school. I will never forget looking out my picture window and seeing something on fire. I was seven years old and asked my brother, "What is that?" He said, "It's a cross." I was like, "A cross? Why is a cross burning in our yard?" And he said, "Oh, it's the Klan." I said, "Why are they doing that?" He replied, "It's because Dad is supporting the integration of schools." It was probably the moment that propelled me forward in making the lifetime decisions that I have made.

We moved to Richmond, and I went to George Wythe High School. It was approximately 98% black. I absolutely adored it and felt completely accepted. I would be asked to go to parties. Many of my friends would teach me how to dance. I had a blast. They took me under their wing. It felt good to find my village.

I admired all the teachers that I had, every single one of them. I went to the yearbook club and to drama and choir, and I just immersed myself. I loved putting on plays. I just enjoyed high-school life. I got as involved with it as I could and met so many people.

I was never picked on. I was bumped into once. The girl swung around, looked at me like, "It's on." I swung around, looked at her,

and puffed up my chest as if to say, "Bring it." And then we both walked away. I've never physically fought in my entire life. I realized there was huge power with self-confidence. When you had self-confidence, then you could walk down the hall.

I have always felt a sense of kindred spirit with people who have not had much, or people who have been oppressed or denied access. I think this goes all the way back to when the KKK terrorized us. They threatened to kill my father. They would pull up at a school board meeting and surround him with their trucks with gun racks, but he was never afraid. At least he didn't appear to be afraid.

I made myself stay away when the alt-right came to Richmond to demonstrate in the fall of 2017. I don't know if I could have witnessed the racism because it took me back to that dark place with the KKK. I could not trust myself to act responsibly and rationally because when you are a child and that happens to you, it's something that's ingrained in you. So I stayed away and cried the whole day as I listened to the accounts on the TV.

I am so upset with the conditions of the public schools, with what teachers and the administration have to deal with. We've got to find a way to have top-rate schools, education, supplies, and materials, and to take care of the teachers. I moved away from Richmond for economic reasons but have come back. I would like to teach at George Wythe High School. That's my goal. ■



Carol Y. Wray, George Wythe High School, 2017

Royal Robinson

Growing up, I always considered myself as having a happy childhood. But I was one of nine kids so we didn't have a lot. My brother and I worked with my father. He delivered wood on a truck throughout the neighborhood, and he had a grocery store at 23rd and M Streets called Robinson Variety that we helped him in. Most of our life was spent in Church Hill; it seemed like we moved almost annually.

I played a lot of football and basketball and hide-and-seek and tag. As eight siblings, we entertained each other a lot. We were close and protected each other; we picked on and teased each other, but we didn't allow anyone else to do it.

My mom and I did a lot of things together, mostly on weekends. When we went to downtown Richmond, I remember asking, "Why do we have to ride in the back of the bus? Why can't we drink from this water fountain? Why can't we use these restrooms? Why can't we eat at the counter in this restaurant?" I don't remember being really sad about these things, but very, very inquisitive about them.

I went to Bolder Elementary School over at 26th and Leigh Streets; it's now a retirement home. I went to Mosby Middle School, which was located almost in the heart of Mosby Projects so there were neighborhood territories. There was a chance that you might have to fight your way into school or fight your way out of school. Then I was bused to George Wythe for high school.

I was upset. I have a brother who's two years older than me, and I was more concerned about him when we got the announcement because he had already gone to Armstrong for two years; and he had to start going to George Wythe. Back then in the black community, really and truly, there were only two high schools to go to: either Armstrong or Walker. I would have gone to Armstrong if it wasn't for busing.

The first year they started busing, Richmond did not have school buses so we had to use the public bus system. I caught the bus from Church Hill to downtown on Broad Street. Then I had to

transfer from Broad Street and catch a second bus to get to Southside, where George Wythe was located.

I believed that white students were smarter than black students, so I was under the impression that I was going to be at a disadvantage going to Wythe. My first day there, after the long bus ride, I remember just seeing all the differences. Everything was different. The faculty, the students, the interactions. Everything. It seemed like all of my senses were awakened to try and take in what all of this meant, emotionally, physically. The quality of the books was so much improved from the books that we had in the black schools. I don't think I'd ever gotten a book that hadn't been used by 10 people before me.

A big part of the struggle was the newness for the kids coming from Church Hill and other parts of Richmond to attend classes with white students. Initially, there were fights and disagreements among the students. There were also struggles between the black students from Church Hill and Southside because of the territorial stuff that existed internally within races as well.

I was an athletic trainer and manager in the tenth and eleventh grades. The city had a program where you could be trained and learn how to tape, how to handle the equipment, the different medicines, and certain minor injuries. So the coach enrolled me in that program, and I actually was getting paid to be a trainer for the City of Richmond. That was a nice perk.

We were probably 60/40, black to white students. I remember going to a football game at City Stadium, and some of the students from one of the inner-city schools were trying to fight some of our white teammates, and I think we surprised them when we defended our white teammates because they were our teammates. That was the unique thing about George Wythe: for some reason, we saw things differently. We wanted it to work, and it did.

I can't say it enough: being bused was probably the best thing that ever happened to me. It completely opened up my world, and life began. ■



Royal Robinson, George Wythe High School, 2017



Descendants of people buried at Old Orchard Cemetery, Camp Peary, Virginia, including Eddie Palmer and Ethelyn Springs (second and third from left), Brian Palmer's father and aunt, 1998. The headstone to the left of Mathew Palmer's cross-shaped headstone may mark the grave of his wife, Julia Fox Palmer, though it is now too eroded to read. Photograph by the U.S. Department of Defense, courtesy of Brian Palmer

Continuity and Community: The Role of Family Legacy and Portraiture in Brian Palmer's Recent Work

ASHLEY KISTLER, *Exhibition Curator*

Everything really started with this place. — Brian Palmer

The place noted above by visual journalist Brian Palmer is Old Orchard Cemetery, which occupies a very modest clearing in the York County woods, east of Williamsburg, Virginia. A family photograph, as it happened, provided a fortuitous introduction to the site. It was discovered by Palmer and his wife, Erin Hollaway Palmer, among a large cache of pictures belonging to Brian's father, Eddie, shortly after his death in 2011. Taken in 1998, the image shows Eddie Palmer together with relatives and friends of his generation, including Brian's Aunt Ethelyn, standing shoulder-to-shoulder around a rough-hewn, cross-shaped headstone chiseled with the name "Matthew [sic] Palmer," who died on February 20, 1927, at the age of 86, as is also inscribed on the marker.

Palmer recognized the name of his great-grandfather, knowing little else about him, and realized from recalling childhood stories where the group had assembled. Surrounded for decades by the vast 9,000-acre military reservation of Camp Peary, which hosts a covert CIA training facility, Old Orchard Cemetery was once part of the town of Magruder, settled mostly by freedmen and women after the Civil War but also home to whites.¹ "It was a place," Palmer commented in a recent article, "where black families could live a little freer, even in the days of Jim Crow."² That is until 1942, when federal legislation known as the Second War Powers Act allowed

government seizure of private land for military purposes. Eddie was 14 years old when his family and nearly two hundred others were uprooted from their farms, having been paid a hard-won price for their properties, and the entire town dismantled.

Palmer also remembers the difficulties his father said he encountered with the U.S. Department of Defense and other officials when arranging that visit to Old Orchard Cemetery 20 years ago. While gaining admittance to the restricted grounds of Camp Peary is never a simple matter for civilians, Eddie Palmer's account of his experience suggests that the reasonably easy access accorded white families at the time was not necessarily extended to their African American counterparts. Characterized by his son as an angry man, caught in a Jim Crow rage, he looks into the camera with a stoic, unyielding expression that, as a viewer examining this picture can't help but imagine, surely masks a simmering resentment, aggravated by a bias he felt impeded his return to his grandfather's grave nearly 60 years after the family's eviction from their eastern Virginia home.

In 2012, Palmer organized his own family trip to Camp Peary, initially spurred by the challenge of visiting a top-secret military base, reminiscent of circumstances he encountered while embedded

with the U.S. Marines in Iraq some years earlier.³ The group was directed by a friendly but armed escort to the small cemetery, which, as it turned out, was located next to a firing range. Palmer recalls, however, that “something started to change in the presence of my great-grandfather’s grave.”⁴ As seen in the photograph he took that day, the entire left arm of Mathew Palmer’s headstone had broken off during the years between family visits. At a second stop on the base, the group observed, by contrast, the great care devoted to maintaining and preserving another cemetery, with its grave dedicated to the Unknown Confederate Soldier, as well as an adjacent church that once also served Magruder’s small white populace. The impression of profound neglect conveyed by Palmer’s image highlights this selective stewardship, emblematic of a stark and unconscionable disparity that he would soon confront again.

The fractured marker provided Palmer with an entryway into his great-grandfather’s story that brought with it a deeper understanding at once of the sheer brutality of chattel slavery and the extraordinary resilience mustered by both Mathew Palmer and his wife, Julia Fox Palmer. Born enslaved on Virginia plantations, they liberated themselves toward the end of the Civil War and later became citizens; Mathew Palmer had earlier joined the 115th Infantry Regiment of the U.S. Colored Troops, eventually arriving in York County a veteran. Among the many revelations his headstone sparked is this forceful quandary posed by Palmer: “How can this continue to be, that this incredibly rich, important part of our collective history is not recognized for what it is? It’s not just that these amazing American stories aren’t valued; they’ve been systematically devalued.”

Despite the immediate impact of this visit, little did Palmer and Hollaway Palmer anticipate that shortly it would redirect their life and work together. Raised and educated in the Northeast, Palmer

had spent much of his 30-year career traveling the globe to such far-flung locales as China, Afghanistan, Iraq, Thailand, Burma, and Bangladesh. In retrospect, he interprets the serpentine path of this personal and professional journey, in part, as a means of escape from a painful, complicated family history — an unforeseen recognition of intent that evokes his father’s eventual flight from Virginia for the wider world of Poland, Germany, California, and New York. But the deeply felt connection he experienced at his great-grandfather’s gravesite pivoted Palmer southward to Hampton, Virginia, where the couple began researching, in 2013, a documentary about Magruder’s historically black community titled *Make the Ground Talk*. “To voluntarily immerse myself in this subject,” Palmer observes, “was a huge paradox.”

The “everything” referenced in Palmer’s introductory quote has since come to encompass a host of other ramifications emanating from a new-found commitment shaped by his family legacy. The couple’s decision to move to Richmond the following year was signaled by little flashes of gray and white glimpsed through dense thickets of ivy and brush on their first drive past East End Cemetery, located just over the city line in Henrico County. Established in the late 19th century, at a time when segregation permeated every aspect of American society, including the disposition of the dead, this historic African American cemetery became the final resting place of approximately 17,500 black Richmonders, many of them prominent community members, for whom even the most minimal burial records now no longer exist. After a half century of neglect, unbridled overgrowth and illegally dumped trash have disappeared graves and crumbled headstones; most of the African American gravesites of neighboring Evergreen Cemetery are likewise obscured beneath a nearly impenetrable snarl of vegetation. In one of eight urban and landscape photographs by Palmer featured in the exhibition, (p. 78) lush cascades of kudzu and Virginia creeper occlude entry onto Evergreen’s grounds, leaving visible only traces



Brian Palmer, Untitled [headstone for Mathew Palmer, Old Orchard Cemetery, Camp Peary, Virginia], 2012. Courtesy of the artist

of a once-navigable path. Like East End, it is a short drive from the neatly groomed, taxpayer-funded Confederate section of Oakwood Cemetery.⁵

The relentless effort of restoring these cemeteries constitutes a process of reclaiming the history of an entire community, literally headstone by headstone. As of September 2018, nearly six of East End's 16 acres, with over 3,000 readable markers, have been restituted. Underscoring the transformative potential at the heart of this enormous endeavor, Palmer says, "Every marker we find is a victory, because each one contributes to the larger narrative of Richmond, of America." As core volunteers for the last four years, the couple has spent countless hours immersed in the physical labor of restoration, while also helping to expand and coordinate a diverse, cross-generational volunteer corps; enlisting the participation of numerous community organizations and educational institutions; and further garnering support by creating the nonprofit Friends of East End Cemetery.⁶ Perhaps most importantly, they continue to comprehensively document the cemetery's gradual reemergence through Palmer's photographs and articles and Hollaway Palmer's research and writing.⁷ The luminous bloom of a yucca, appearing in a second photograph, (p. 79) rises like a sentinel above a cleared section of graves at East End, which seems to mirror Palmer's hopeful, determined stance, as well as his resolve to make images that foreground aspects of this reclamation other than tragedy and neglect.

The unearthing of a more faithful, inclusive picture of the past, incrementally but steadily coming into focus at East End, reinforces for Palmer the crucial need to generate awareness of black people as central, consistent, and active contributors to American life. Notwithstanding the great heroes with whom we are all familiar, he emphasizes, "This unbroken strand of African Americans who've been this country, who are this country, has received little, if any,



Brian Palmer, Untitled [Erin Hollaway Palmer and Brian Palmer after an evening cleanup session, East End Cemetery, Henrico County, Virginia], 2016. Courtesy of the artist

recognition." The connective tissue explored by his work links his great-grandfather with other members of freedom's first generation — men and women born into slavery who lived to see its demise — and their descendants buried at East End, and now with the individuals whose personal stories animate *Growing Up in Civil Rights Richmond: A Community Remembers*. These are hardly insignificant stories, Palmer reminds us. "As part of a continuous stream of experiences vital to our understanding of history," he affirms, "they must be collected, honored, and elevated to a societal level before they, too, are lost and forgotten."

Against this backdrop of crystallizing insights, Palmer's decision to undertake this project offered both an opportunity to extend his community involvement and a challenge to create portraits requiring a fairly significant departure from his usual, more candid and spontaneous process of taking photographs. Certainly, his manifold body of work includes portraits, but these derive mostly from a journalistic context, wrested from the flux of human activity

and often the result of on-the-spot responses.⁸ Palmer's photograph of the jubilant downtown crowd encircling the Maggie L. Walker memorial at its 2017 unveiling on Richmond's Broad Street (p. 6) exemplifies his typical approach and engrosses the viewer in a colorful flurry of telling gestures and interactions taking place beneath the monumental statue's outward gaze. A nimble and astute documentarian, he is able to identify vantage points like this perspective, which produce notable, unexpected depictions of events and public spaces; but he also employs straight-on, even deadpan views that have their own striking, if understated effect, as in his portrayal of the Jefferson Davis monument, erected over a century earlier, in 1907, on Monument Avenue.

The focus of this photograph, (p. 10) taken from the back of the memorial, is not the Confederate president, unseen except for a tiny outstretched arm visible just below the colonnade's entablature, but the task of scrubbing away the last remnant of graffiti from the monument's base, tackled by a solitary worker, the composition's central figure. (Hours earlier, the message painted on the monument read "Black Lives Matter.") Here, Palmer again alludes to a tradition of preferential treatment by those bent on upholding an untarnished version of ideological symbols and historical myths that only recently have been discredited and tumbled into disrepute. Selected from a much larger group, and interspersed among the portraits in the exhibition installation, this pair of photographs, those of the cemetery, and four other Richmond scenes visually bolster themes central to the stories of the project's 30 participants.

As suggested above, Palmer constantly negotiates a creative continuum traveling between literal rendition and lyrical interpretation. While he produces singular images that are considerably more than just a visual note of what appeared before the camera, he judiciously maintains a firm footing in the descriptive power of his medium, compelled by a journalist's imperative to render truthful depictions,

as undermined as these valuable efforts are in today's partisan world. This ever-critical responsibility of balancing form and content called for sensitive deliberation in making the portraits for *Growing Up in Civil Rights Richmond*, to which Palmer's understanding of his sitters' backgrounds, gained from reading or listening to their stories, also contributed over the year of completing the work. "I needed to be able to see these people clearly," he says, referring to the specific formal qualities of their portraits. His intent underscores just as emphatically the importance he also placed on conveying an underlying feature he feels is shared by all the participants: the moral authority that comes with having sustained, as children and youth, the distress and disorientation of desegregation and the other momentous upheavals of the civil rights era and, in spite of this trauma, realizing full, self-determined adult lives.

Palmer's desire to render clear-eyed representations of these individuals, now middle-aged and older, is reflected in his inclination to photograph them at close range, aided by only a simple reflector or two, minimal fill light, and little, if any digital correction. Over half of his portraits present intimate, head-and-shoulders views of his sitters; the other dozen portraits, shot at slightly wider angles but with the same shallow depth-of-field, likewise rivet attention on nuances of expression and subtle shades of feeling and tone that define their distinctive mature countenances. The exhibition's large-scale prints beautifully relay these details. Settings for the portraits, chosen collaboratively by the photographer and the participants, include churches, homes, schools, libraries, parks, offices, museums, a diner, the Maggie Walker Plaza, and the Richmond Slave Trail along the James River — in other words, the myriad places and institutions making up the community that they have helped to build and transform. All of these factors combine to create a powerful, overall impression of strength, conviction, and compassion, indicative of the esteem with which Palmer himself regards their respective coming-of-age experiences. "They are the continuity here, the anchors," he

reiterates, “and they are a source of inspiration and faith.” Moreover, he adds, “They have put things in perspective for me.”

Palmer’s last comment, it seems, relates to an experience he recounts from his graduate-school days in New York. Though thoroughly grounded in modern and contemporary theory at the School of Visual Arts, he singles out as especially formative a lesson gleaned from the wider world. A defining moment stemmed from the indignation expressed by a woman on a Harlem street, offended that a young photographer venturing up to her neighborhood from downtown Manhattan would presume to photograph her without permission. “Who are you?” she demanded of Palmer. Working from an aloof, anonymous vantage point, virtually hidden behind his camera, he began to understand, would never yield the authentic photographs he aspired to capture; these images were contingent on some kind of personal exchange, an awareness reflective of his wider recognition that “I had to be part of something.” This realization in turn sparked another: “I needed to make myself vulnerable in order to get the pictures I wanted.”

Palmer’s capacity to internalize this lesson, reinforced by the example of individuals willing to step forward to discuss their lives, was a necessary ingredient in both his decision to undertake the project and its success. And it also undergirded his embrace of a family history from which he previously seemed determined to distance himself. The purposeful path leading from the touchstone of Mathew Palmer’s marker to this exhibition of Brian Palmer’s portraits partakes of that continuity of contribution and commitment addressed so movingly by his work. ■

ENDNOTES

1. The town was named for Confederate Gen. John B. Magruder, who defended the Virginia Peninsula against Union troops during the Civil War.
2. Steve Roberts, Jr., “Tidewater’s Lost Towns: Camp Peary’s Legacy in Williamsburg,” *Williamsburg Yorktown Daily*, January 29, 2018 (wydaily.com/local-news/2018/01/29/tidewaters-lost-towns-camp-pearys-legacy-in-williamsburg/).
3. Working as an embedded journalist, Palmer followed a U.S. Marine combat unit through three deployments in Iraq from 2004 to 2006. These experiences, with additional reporting and research from 2007 to 2009, resulted in the Ford Foundation-funded documentary *Full Disclosure* (2011, 57 min.), which has been shown on The Documentary Channel and at venues around the country.
4. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations attributed to Brian Palmer derive from a conversation with the author on June 26, 2018.
5. See Brian Palmer, “For the Forgotten African-American Dead,” *The New York Times*, January 7, 2017 (www.nytimes.com/2017/01/07/opinion/sunday/for-the-forgotten-african-american-dead.html); Brian Palmer and Erin Hollaway Palmer, “Reclaiming History, One Grave at a Time,” *The Nation*, October 15, 2015 (www.thenation.com/article/reclaiming-black-history-one-grave-at-a-time/); and Brian Palmer and Seth Freed Wessler, “The Costs of the Confederacy” *Smithsonian*, December 2018, pp. 54-63,76,78. Forthcoming is a program on this topic for *Reveal*, the nationally distributed radio show and podcast co-produced by the Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR) and the Public Radio Exchange (PRX).
6. For further information on East End Cemetery and the ongoing volunteer work there, see www.eastendcemeteryrva.com and www.eastendcemetery.wordpress.com.
7. This material is collected in *The Afterlife of Jim Crow: East End and Evergreen Cemeteries in Photographs*, a 98-page, limited-edition book self-published by Palmer and Hollaway Palmer, June 2018. Selected photographs and text were previously featured in the exhibition *All Our Sorrows Heal: Restoring Richmond’s East End Cemetery*, on view at the Wilton Companies Gallery, UR Downtown, September 4, 2015 – March 4, 2016. Planned in conjunction with *Growing Up in Civil Rights Richmond: A Community Remembers*, a multimedia exhibition about East End by Palmer and Hollaway Palmer appears at 1708 Gallery in downtown Richmond, February 8 – March 23, 2019.
8. See www.brianpalmer.photos.



The only extant photograph of Mathew Palmer, Brian Palmer’s great-grandfather, discovered on the wall of Mt. Pilgrim Baptist Church, Williamsburg, Virginia, which he founded with his wife, Julia Fox Palmer, and others in 1897. Mathew Palmer also served as a deacon of the church. Courtesy of Brian Palmer



Brian Palmer, *Untitled* [17 June 2017, Evergreen Cemetery, Richmond, Virginia; area at the 60-acre cemetery overgrown by kudzu], archival inkjet print on paper, 33.3 x 50 inches, lent courtesy of the artist



Brian Palmer, *Untitled* [29 May 2018, East End Cemetery at dusk, on the border of Henrico County, Virginia, and the City of Richmond], archival inkjet print on paper, 26.7 x 40 inches, lent courtesy of the artist

Leonard L. Edloe

I'm the son of a pharmacist who was orphaned at 12. His father died from the Spanish flu, so that's why I had a real thing about immunizations when I was practicing pharmacy. My mother was the daughter of a tobacco farmer down in Lunenburg County.

I got involved in Youth Council when I went to Armstrong High School. My parents had always been very active in civil rights, though not on the front line. My father would carry me with him to City Hall to pay the poll tax. So I was very aware of things that were going on in the city. It was just around the time when people were arrested at Thalhimers, at the sit-in, that we really became involved.

At first it was just meetings, then the protests started at City Hall. I never will forget, as we came out, the police photographers were taking our pictures. And I looked straight in the camera, "Yeah. It's ME."

After the Voter Rights Act was passed, I'd canvass every day, getting people registered to vote. That's why it upsets me so when I look at the election scene in Richmond and how so few people vote. My father ingrained that thing in me about the poll tax. \$1.57 was a whole lot of money back then, but he made the commitment that he was going to be able to vote, and his wife was going to be able to vote. I'm so glad he did that, and I'm so glad I was able to take part in it.

I remember in 1963 when they had the SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference] annual meeting here. It was at First African Baptist Church, which was just two blocks from my house. It was a real pleasure for me to get to see Martin Luther King. From then on, they had this program on WANT-AM; they would tape his sermons and speeches, and Tom Mitchell would narrate. In addition to being a pharmacist, 21 years ago I became a pastor,

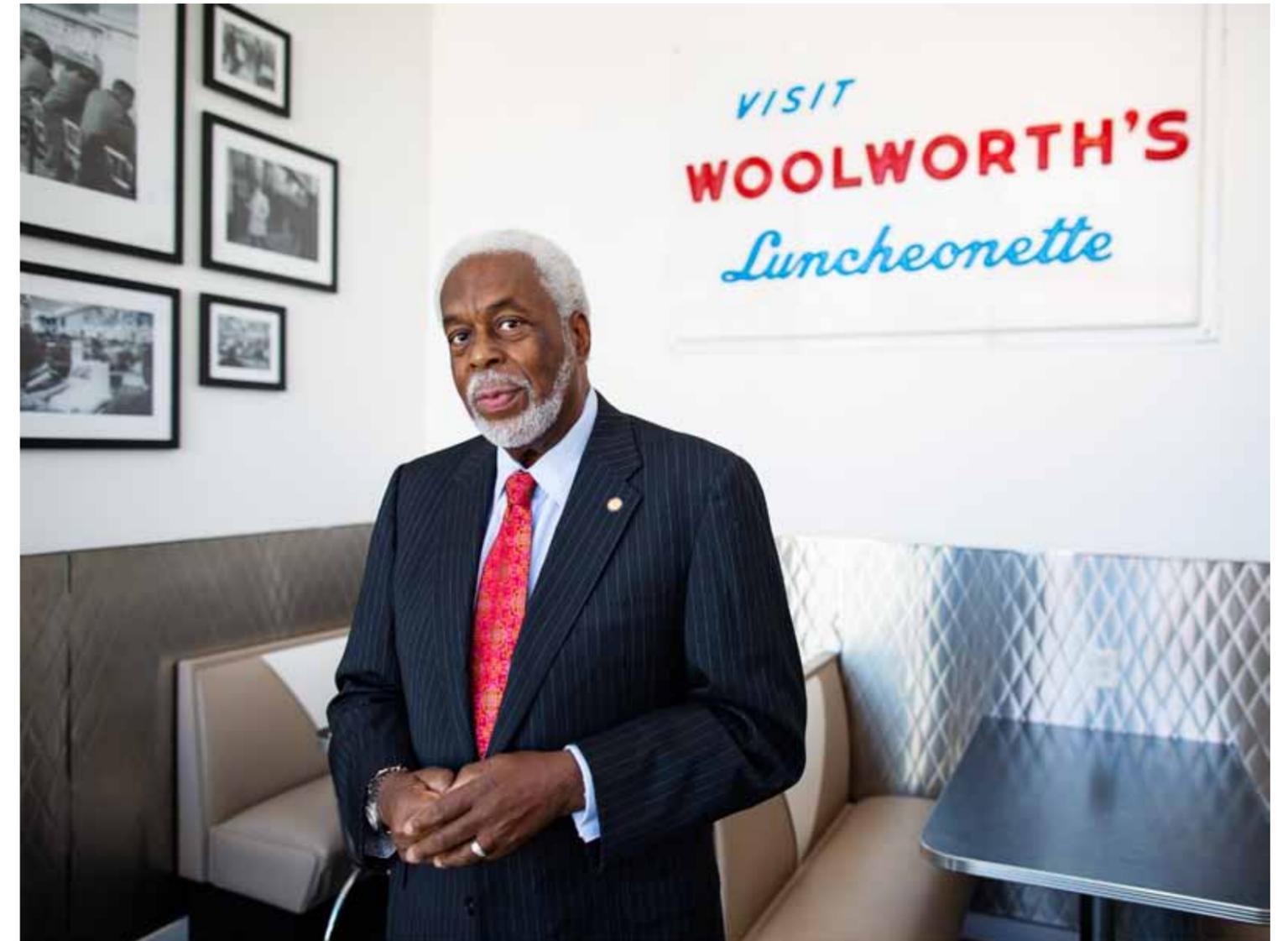
and so I use a whole lot of Martin Luther King's words because it still speaks to us today.

I never will forget one day my mother, my sister, and I got on the Ginter Park bus, and the bus was packed. A white man was sitting on this seat up front. There were two seats empty. And my mother said, "Is it alright for the children to sit there?" And he said, "It's fine." The bus driver says, "Those children have to move." And the man said, "It's alright with me." And so the bus driver got off the bus and, you know, all the black people on the bus wanted to get home. They said, "Bring the children back here, we'll hold them." My mother says, "No." The driver stayed off the bus about ten minutes; I mean he was going to call the police. And then he got back on the bus and said the law didn't have time to come. And so the bus goes down the street. Both parents said, "You're just like everybody else. I know what the law says, but never let that limit who you are. And stand up for your rights."

When I was treasurer at a black history museum, I met one of John Mitchell's descendants, and he was saying, "There are a lot of things we just want to suppress to keep things quiet. Nobody wants to tell that story here in Richmond."

I try to encourage people all the time to sit down and tell their story and record it. So much richness has been lost. I try to teach my daughter, and we have a hard time getting to my nieces and nephews, to let them know what's going on. Even the young people in my church, they have a hard time comprehending what has happened.

I'm in the pouring-out stage of my life, you know. A whole lot has been poured in, and I want to pour it out because I don't want any of it to go to the grave. ■



Leonard L. Edloe, permanent collection display, Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia, 2018

Myra Goodman Smith

Both of my parents were from Amelia County, Virginia. That's where I live now, in my parents' house. My ancestors are from plantations in Amelia County. I would say 99% of the members of Flower Hill Baptist Church are related to me. My parents are buried in the cemetery there, as are my grandparents, my great-grandparents, and my great-great-grandmother. I like projects, so I learned how to clean headstones. There's a process to cleaning headstones.

My father was adopted. His birth mother was 16 years old, and she had been adopted. My father was sent to Amelia County when he was five months old, with a note. I have that note in a frame in my house: "Here is Melvin Lorenzo, five months, I give him all to you." That was 1931. The strange thing is that his birth mother was the sister of my mother's uncle. So that's why everyone in church is related to me. When he went to Amelia County, they pretty much lived in poverty. I had the privilege of meeting my birth grandmother before she died. It was the most amazing thing. I walked into the room and saw myself lying in the bed. I looked so much like her.

Growing up in Richmond during the civil rights era, we were very insulated because we lived in a segregated community. I didn't have anybody call me the n-word until I moved to Chesterfield County, standing on my stoop. I had the best childhood. Most of the people who lived in our neighborhood worked in the post office, or they were teachers, or they owned their own business, or did construction. My dad was probably one of the first African American letter carriers in this area. My mom was a histology technician at the Medical College of Virginia, and she would bring the residents home for dinner. I would get to know a guy from Japan, somebody from England. Having that experience, I was probably more open than a lot of my friends.

When I was in second grade, Martin Luther King was killed. I just remember my mom coming home and lying on the bed and crying, and hearing sirens all over the place. There were fires being set in different places in town. And my mom told me that the next

day there was a different atmosphere when she went to work on Broad Street. People were fearful. I remember we all sat in the room and watched the funeral when I was in class.

I had neighbors across the street who were involved with the Black Panther movement, and they talked me into selling their newspapers. I was probably in third grade. I took those papers to school and was selling them to teachers. I remember Ms. Holly, the principal, said, "Myra, you can't sell these papers here." I didn't understand why.

Amelia Street School was a totally African American school. You had a whole lot of heroes to look to. The PTA was very strong because the people who lived in the community were the PTA. Busing changed the community, especially when it came to parents having a common cause to rally around; they didn't have that anymore. When we moved away from Amelia Street School, my parents' involvement pretty much ceased.

I was an intern to the first two African American women on City Council, Claudia Black McDaniel and Willie Dell. That's what changed my life — understanding politics and city services. I was appointed by City Council when I was eighteen to the Youth Services Commission. One thing I will say about growing up in Richmond: the worst feeling I could ever have is feeling less-than. Sometimes down at the Capital, I was talked to like I was less-than and treated less-than, to the point that I really didn't belong there. I was in college. I was about to graduate. You know, I'm still dealing with this.

Leadership Metro Richmond was created because there was a need for diversity in leadership in this community. Predominantly white men were making a lot of the decisions back in the '60s and '70s. Fortunately, there were wise individuals saying we need women at the table; we need people of color at the table; we need people from different economic areas at the table. And I really want people to keep remembering that. ■



Myra Goodman Smith, Leadership Metro Richmond, 2018

Mark R. Merhige

My dad, Robert R. Merhige Jr., was the oldest boy in a big Irish Catholic family in Long Island, New York. He looked after his little brothers and his sister. He moved down south on a basketball scholarship in the mid-30s to attend High Point College in High Point, North Carolina, and then moved from there to Richmond to take a job coaching football at St. Christopher's School.

He was a very fun guy but pretty serious and cerebral when he needed to be. And my mom was a beautiful, fun party girl. They were friends, and it was obvious that they enjoyed each other. Their friendship is what helped everybody survive some of those ugly times as well.

During those turbulent times, the people we would see on TV were actually showing up at my house. The Today Show or the CBS Morning show would come to interview my mother as part of a segment on my dad. The intense negativity was far more local than it was national to this 12-year-old. One of the things I remember were these little red schoolhouse stickers, which were a sign of protest against integration or at least against busing. That I found disturbing. You felt outnumbered but at the same time that you were on the right team.

My father was appointed to the federal bench in the late '60s, when I was eight years old. The FBI and federal marshals showed up at the house and started making preparations. That was when I became aware of the trickle-down effects of his orders to desegregate the state's public school systems.

In the early '70s, for an adolescent boy, guys with guns and walkie talkies and large lights illuminating the grounds around the house — it was all kind of neat. If you had a choice after school, it was to

go to my house and play basketball; my dad had a better pickup game because two or three marshals were willing to play some hoops as well. I never found it distressing.

You know, people spit on my dad in restaurants. It was ugly, but that came with the territory. He never seemed to truly fear for his own personal safety. He feared for his family's safety. This is why, for a couple of summers, he asked Mom and me to leave the country because he felt like he could go about his day-to-day business with a little more ease. He would tell us, referring to his service in the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II, "Hitler's army couldn't kill me; these guys ain't gonna get me." And you believed it as a kid.

There were African Americans around us socially all the time. Was that different from some of my classmates? Probably. We had a nucleus of friends who were so important to Mom and Dad, and who were also out there fighting these same battles.

Every Sunday, a motorcade — the American Nazi party, the Ku Klux Klan — would ride up and down the road in front of my parents' house, screaming and carrying signs. It was something very much out of a '60s newsreel. One Sunday, I remember, it seemed to be a little more frantic. I was allowed to walk down the driveway to see what was going on, and I ended up in the backseat of a radio broadcaster's car. I still remember listening to him describe the scene in front of me. The broadcaster was painting this vivid, aggressive, scary kind of picture, but I was not seeing the same thing. It was just part of what I had seen every Sunday, you know, for a month. It was not dissimilar to things I was seeing on the national news happening elsewhere; it just happened to be a little closer. ■



Mark R. Merhige at home, Manakin-Sabot, 2017

Yolanda Burrell Taylor

I am a 1972 graduate of Huguenot High School on Forest Hill Avenue, in the annexed portion of Richmond. I grew up with two paternal grandparents, two parents. I would say that I lived a rather sheltered life because even though I was born in '54, and there was probably a lot of turmoil going on at the time, I was not aware of it. I think my parents and my grandparents made a conscious effort to not let me feel the brunt of what was going on at that time.

My parents both attended Virginia Union University. My father fought in the Korean War, which I believe interrupted his education. And when he returned home from the Korean War, he went to work in the Post Office.

Both parents worked; my grandfather worked; and my grandmother kept me. She did not drive, so we rode the bus a lot. I did not realize it at the time, but we always sat in the back of the bus because that's where we were supposed to sit. I just thought that was her preference. I can't remember riding the bus with my mother, and now that I think about it, this was probably a conscious decision on her part. She always called the cab company.

There were a lot of social organizations for children. They still exist, but I don't think they're as prevalent as they were then. I was a member of Tots and Teens. A lot of black parents at that time put their children through these organizations because it was an opportunity for the kids to come together socially and experience things as a group — go skating or to a play — and get exposure that otherwise they may not have had. Or, it may not have been safe to do these things in smaller numbers. As I became older, I realized things were done the way they were because it was not safe to do otherwise.

Six of us integrated Albert H. Hill Junior High School. Because the black community was very tight knit, we all knew each other. I had never attended school with white kids before, and I had never had a white teacher.

A good number of black students were bused to Huguenot High School. I knew there was white flight when we were bused in,

but I did not realize the extent of it. A lot of the white students who were at Huguenot went further into Chesterfield County. The school didn't really bother me as much as it bothered a lot of students because I had already been to Albert Hill.

All of us went through some type of turmoil with the legislated busing. I am learning that a lot of white parents and students felt that it was devastating only to them, that it was not devastating to the black community, that our parents were not outraged over the fact that their kids were being bused and having to travel for hours to and from school.

When we were bused to Huguenot, I think they thought we were just going to be there and not take on any leadership roles, but we did. We got involved with every aspect because we were students who had been in leadership roles in the schools we had been to before.

I was the first black varsity cheerleader at Huguenot. I had a regular column that I wrote for the student newspaper, "Yonny B's Bag." I had an opportunity to be sarcastic about things and enjoyed that. And probably much to the disappointment of a lot of my schoolmates, I became homecoming queen.

A lot of my friends left Huguenot with a very bad taste in their mouth; they decided they wanted to go to an HBCU. I was accepting of the fact that I was in an integrated situation. I was not going to take any guff off anybody. But I wanted to learn and make the best of the situation I was in.

As a child with no income, when Momma or Daddy's birthday came around, I would write and give them a poem. Anything that I wrote was very personal, and I kept it to myself, up until a few years ago when I decided to go ahead and see what happens. I've published two books of poetry; I decided I wanted to leave something behind to my daughters other than a memory. I have a lot of historical perspectives in my poetry; my poems reference childhood memories of second-class citizenship, blacks not being on TV, and things like that. ■



Yolanda Burrell Taylor, Albert Hill Middle School, 2017

Woody Holton

My father, Linwood Holton, decided at the age of twelve that he wanted to be governor of Virginia. This became a real mission of his for the rest of his life. He was a great fan of Abraham Lincoln and wanted to give Lincoln's party — the Republican party — enough strength in Virginia to give people an actual choice at the polls. When he won in 1969, it was the first time since Reconstruction that anybody other than a Southern Democrat had been elected governor of Virginia.

We moved to Richmond from Roanoke in January of 1970, when I was ten. My sister Anne and I went to Mary Munford Elementary, which was pretty rough because we had to deal with the status of being the governor's children.

But then, that summer, U.S. District Judge Robert Merhige implemented the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in Virginia. That decision had been made back in 1954 with this wonderful phrase: all deliberate speed. All deliberate speed means speed, but deliberate speed. As in, hurry up and wait. And of course the Virginia legislature and the governors of Virginia up until then had focused on the waiting part. So it had been 16 years since *Brown v. Board of Education*, and there was only token integration. There was one black kid in my class.

Judge Merhige ordered that we had to administer integration as an actual fact, not just as a theory as had been the case for about ten years. And that meant busing. A lot of people had been riding buses to school forever. Specifically, African American kids had been riding buses past two or three white schools to get to the one black school in town. But in this case, instead of having 99% white schools on one side of town, and 99% black schools on the other side of town, busing meant as close to a 50/50 split as possible throughout the city.

My father had made a very pro-integration statement in his inaugural address that January. But busing was so unpopular among white Virginians that people were really pressuring him.

Many whites were furious at Dad for being reluctant, for not immediately taking the lead against busing. I remember there was a big caravan led by this group that opposed busing; they called themselves SOS, Save Our Schools, and they had a lot of these symbols of the little red schoolhouse, which is what they said they were saving.

Dad did decide that he was going to do the opposite of what his predecessors had done. Not only was he going to support busing, but he was going to make sure that his own family complied with the law, even though the Governor's Mansion is technically exempt. "If this rule about Capitol Square didn't exist, where would my kids go to school?," he asked. And the answer was Mosby Middle School, which had been pretty much 100% black. So Anne and I went to Mosby.

It was tougher than Mary Munford because it was even more of a mob scene in front of the school as people and TV cameras were waiting for us. And they crowded around us even inside of the school. I had wonderful teachers and good classmates and all that, but every time I left the classroom, there'd be this crowd of students those first couple of days, "Hey boy, are you the Governor's son?" Just to be a celebrity like that all of a sudden was extremely intimidating and unpleasant.

There were bomb threats and all sorts of death threats that ended my father's political career. People made it clear what his stand on busing had cost him. Of course, nobody ever framed it racially. They only said, "Oh, it's not blacks we're against, it's busing." I'd like to go back in time now as a 12-year-old and say, "Well, you never minded the buses when you were riding them past the black school to get to a segregated white school."

We have that great privilege of having a father who had a chance to do the right thing, or sustain his political career by doing the wrong thing. And he chose to do the right thing. That's something to be very proud of. ■



Woody Holton at his sister's home, North Side, 2018

Loretta Tillman

When they closed the schools in Prince Edward County, there was a call out for anybody who had an education background to please come and help because the black kids were not getting anything at that point. My mother and dad decided, "Yeah, we're gonna do this." So from September of '63 to May of '64, every Friday we'd drive up Hull Street to Farmville. My dad would drop us off and drive back to Richmond in the middle of the night. My mother would teach wherever the heck she was teaching — people's basements, churches. I would play out in the tall grass, which was irritating to me as a city kid. My dad would drive back on Sunday afternoon to pick us up, and we'd come on back home and then do it all again. My mother did not play about this; she really believed in integration and equality.

Once, my mother stopped at Woolworth's; it was a whites-only lunch counter. And my mother sat herself in a booth and sat me next to her and dared anybody to say one thing. I remember turning around and looking, and everybody was boring down on the both of us for being there. My mother didn't care; she was not having it. We got our food and ate it right there. We would drive down 17th Street, and the slave posts were still up; they would chain slaves there to be sold. My mother took great pains to tell me this.

My dad died in '65 of pneumonia. The fact that he smoked did not help. At that point, two thirds of the population smoked, my mother included. One day I woke up, and my mother was having a heart attack. I was nine. She went back and forth to the hospital, stayed for months at a time. She called me once and said, "I'm coming home tomorrow!" The next day, when I was in school, they told me to go home and said she had died.

That was just the way things were back then. People died a lot earlier than they needed to. Everybody expected to be dead by 65, and many of them were. Which is why social security is set where it is.

My sister had a poster of Angela Davis, and I had one of Huey P. Newton. People admired them. Sometimes you would see people in dashikis. That whole period was about what could be. Not one day out of my life have I lost that, and I raised my children with that.

I got admitted to UVA. The family did just about everything they could to get me not to go. They wanted me to go to Virginia State. UVA was a drunken locker room, a place where racism was prevalent.

I went into the Air Force, lived in Texas, and then served in England for three years. President Reagan built up the service numbers to unreal levels, but afterwards there were reductions. I ended up a homeless vet, with a baby, and they had no services to help me. We hadn't had a war in so long people didn't know what a vet was.

Next, it was just me living in Wickham Court for 18 years. I had little kids. I did community development and organizing, and was recognized by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. I finally decided I wanted to become a teacher, joined AmeriCorps when it first started, and got my teaching license and started teaching in Petersburg, and then went to Henrico, where I retired two years ago.

I'm a big proponent of pulling down these statues. They're representative of some very bad things. If you're black, you need to embrace the fact that you had slave ancestry. My great grandfather was a slave. He was born about 1820 or so. He was the son of his master and paid his own father for his freedom so he could get out. Then he paid my grandmother's father for her freedom because he was also a slave owner. We had some aunts who were born into slavery. There's nothing wrong with that, but if you're on the other side, you need to understand where we're coming from. ■



Loretta Tillman, Carver Elementary School, 2018

John Dorman

We started out in Church Hill when I was little and moved uptown when I was seven or eight years old. We always ended up within walking distance of a school. Education was stressed to all nine of us. Our neighborhood was segregated, so everybody played and studied together. As a kid, I had either a paper route or worked in a garage. I was interested in cars, and up on Catherine Street, I started working in the garage when I was 11 years old. So that's where I worked until I went into the military. During the summer we used to sell bottles; we always did something to put something on the table or help the family. It wasn't always about buying candy or a Tootsie Roll. It was doing something to help the family.

Gangs started back in the '30s here in Richmond, and they continued through the '60s and '70s. Broad Street was a dividing line. We were always aware of where we were going all the time. We always traveled in pairs or more so in case somebody got injured, somebody could run and tell somebody else. We never traveled alone.

When I was 12 or 13 I got involved with the Youth Council of the YMCA. It was segregated. We didn't have any Caucasians in that building on Leigh Street. I went there basically because the instructors from Virginia Union University would come down to the YMCA to teach us karate. They got involved with telling us about segregation and the civil rights movement in America. They taught us how to protect ourselves in case the policemen had dogs and batons, and how we could defend our faces.

On Saturday mornings, we would march with around 40 people, mostly Virginia Union students and the YMCA Youth Council. The adults would go in the store or in Julian's restaurant for a sit-in. Because we were youths, they would never carry us inside to be arrested. So two or three of them would get arrested, and then we would go back to the Y or down to City Hall and sit on

the steps. City Hall was our favorite spot because people were always passing by.

I marched with Dr. Martin Luther King. That was August 28, 1963.

A lot of things transpired after I went into the military in 1966, right out of high school. Dr. King was assassinated. Robert Kennedy was assassinated. In 1969, I came back to Richmond from Vietnam on June 25 and went downtown the next day. There was a race riot on Broad Street with hundreds of state police. But that was nothing new to me because when I was stationed in Germany for 15 months, we had a race riot in Munich between blacks and whites.

During my year in Vietnam, there was a lot of racial tension, too. Although we were fighting the Viet Cong, we were fighting two wars as blacks. We were fighting the whites from Texas, Georgia, and Alabama. I was in charge of a motor pool. When one of our M60A1 Patton tanks came into our motor pool, they were flying the Confederate flag on a U.S. tank. It was a policy that if you requested a flag of your state, they would send you a state flag of Virginia, Alabama, whatever. But a lot of them wanted to fly the Confederate flag in their hooches. That wasn't allowed, and it caused a lot of tension.

I was baptized when I was 11 years old at Moore Street Baptist church, and I'm still a member there. When I grew up, we were in the Boy Scouts at the church. After I came back from the service, I went to help out my Scoutmaster. He got a second job in 1970, so I was Scoutmaster for the next 40 years after that.

At the commencement exercise at Armstrong High School in '66, the principal George Peterson's last words were, "Give to the world the best that you have, and the best will come back to you." That has stuck with me all my life. It's probably why I'm doing so much in the community and trying to help people because whatever you do, it's coming back to you much better. ■



John Dorman, gallery display "This is Richmond, Virginia," The Valentine, 2018

Nell Draper Winston

I grew up in Henrico County, in a place where everyone knew each other, everyone. Families were very close-knit. My parents spent quality time with us. They taught us forgiveness, respect for each other and for ourselves, how to comport ourselves.

During my early life, we didn't have running water. My father and mom were members of the neighborhood association. We tried to get lights, power, and sewage. It took a while, but the county finally came through. When we got to school, there was a potbelly stove. My brother and most of the boys had to collect kindling wood, and they used to come home with colds. I went to Virginia Randolph High School. That was the only school we were able to attend, 20 miles from our home. We would wake up when it was dark and get home when it was almost dark. It was a long ride because we didn't have I-64 and I-95 then.

I attended Virginia Union University and graduated in 1962. To prepare for protests during that time, we had two weeks of training by two of the ministers from Virginia Union. We practiced what we thought might happen. We pushed each other down, smacked each other, and did everything we thought that the police or any other person might do. We stopped short of spitting on each other. We went out and picketed Thalhimers. Ketchup was thrown on one person. Others were spat upon, but that didn't happen to me. And they did, finally, adhere to our demands to desegregate their eatery.

When we boycotted Thalhimers, Thursdays were days when the ministers picketed. One day, I was on Broad Street and saw our pastor, Reverend George Damascus Hill, just proud and tall.

And I was never so proud of him or New Bridge Baptist Church than that day. It was raining. He was 79 or 80 years old, and he was there in the rain with his umbrella, still picketing.

I recall my dad and mom took me to Thalhimers for picketing. I didn't know until a month later that they were on the other side of the street, watching. I thought they had given me a lift and went on. They were very afraid but also very, very supportive. My dad was humorous; he would say: "Never thought I would have a child who would think that it would be a good thing to get arrested." And he laughed! But he understood why we felt that we had to do this. We knew that it was dangerous, but at the same time, we just felt that enough was enough. So they supported us all the way.

When I was at Virginia Union in the late 1950s and early '60s, I attended quite a few meetings. We had people come from the Urban League—Whitney Young, Adam Clayton Powell, different leaders from that era. Once, we had a meeting at one of the churches, and someone announced that there were agitators outside and that a bomb had been placed in the building. I was very, very proud that no one left.

Another time when we were picketing, we were standing on the steps of Virginia Union's Belgian building, and who should come out from the car but Dr. King. He gave us a pep talk like you wouldn't believe. We set out for the protest of Thalhimers, and this was a turning point in my life.

At Virginia Union, we had what was called an Annual Week of Prayer. This particular time Dr. King came, and he just inspired the



Nell Draper Winston, Fairfield Public Library, 2017

Glennys E. Fleming

students so much. He talked about what happened to him, to his home; it was bombed. He encouraged us to do the very best that you can. Actually, he reinforced what our parents taught us. He was just a brilliant person. His love for people shone through as he talked, along with his nonviolent attitude.

I was there, trying to get his autograph. There were students from RPI, which is now VCU, and some of them were very tall. I was getting beat in the face with their elbows, trying to get to him. He stopped and said, “One moment please.” Everything just stopped. He said, “This young lady has been standing here, waiting for a long time,” and he reached out for my book and signed it.

My brother, Louis, left for New York in '57. He lived for a short while at the Sloane House YMCA, in a neighborhood called the Bowery, and he wound up living down the hall from Langston Hughes. Mr. Hughes had purchased this brownstone in New York from his aunt. He had roomers, and my brother happened to have been one of those roomers. We all went up to see him there and met Mr. Hughes, who was a very handsome, noble-looking man. He had this smoking jacket and this Sherlock Holmes pipe. He seemed like a very kind person. That was a big moment in my life because he was one of the great poets of our time.

When I graduated, I was employed by the City of Richmond at the Social Service Bureau. I was a child-welfare worker. Later, I went into AFDC [Aid to Families with Dependent Children] and did some group counseling. I enjoyed my work very much. I was interested in young people and the way they think. It was a good career for me.

We are descendants of kings and queens. The Lord has brought us a long way as a race. I want young people today to know that. And I want them to realize that people suffered and died so that we could have this partial freedom that we are experiencing now. We're not there yet. But I want them to know our heritage. ■

We were a very small family. We grew up in the churches as well. And so, for me, that was my safety net, just being there with my family. When I mix family, education, and church together, that combination has helped to make me the person I am today. And it also includes the experiences I've had in dealing with the ups and downs. I think some of the struggles and challenges that I experienced with people of different races — they've just all shaped me and made me stronger and made me aware that I don't want to be like that. I want to always just love people, because that's what we're supposed to do. We're here for a purpose: we're here to love and help one another.

I went to John Marshall High School. The Mighty Justices. We were there in '68 and '69. 1970 was the big year of change. A few years ago, two other ladies and I talked about trying to get seven Richmond high schools to do a reunion together. Our goal was to have at least 300 people from the seven schools. Considering that one of them had over 300 students in the class, it seemed like it should be a small accomplishment, but it was very challenging. We hit a little bit of a snag that hurt us in some ways because it almost looked like it did 40 years ago, with some people not wanting to be part of this citywide reunion. I really do believe that it's a racial thing. One lady from John Marshall — she is the only white person who has been to every reunion with us.

We're getting older, and we've never really identified our feelings about those days. It impacted everybody. It impacted the teachers because many of them were shifted around to different schools. It impacted families. A lot of families moved away if they weren't comfortable with their children going to the school.

I've been disabled since 2006 and have had a lot of health challenges. I was actually 33 when my son came into my life, which seemed late at that time. He put a lot of joy in my life because I had somewhere to put my focus — not on myself with my health challenges, or ups and downs in my career. I recognized that I had to accept what I was doing in life for work because I needed to be able to provide for my son. And that's really, for me, the bigger thing — making sure I could provide for him.

I'm a mentor to young folks. Young people need to see some positive role models. I always had positive role models in my life, be it my grandmother, my parents, or some of my teachers. They were always very positive and encouraged me. I just want to be that same type of person and lift someone up to a different environment because a lot of them are from environments where they don't have an opportunity to experience things. Children are my life. ■

Renee Fleming Mills



Sisters Glennys E. Fleming (left) and Renee Fleming Mills, Ebenezer Baptist Church, 2017

I grew up in North Side, Barton Avenue, and Brookfield Gardens. My mother was a teacher at several different schools in Richmond. My father worked at Consolidated Bank and Trust Company, one of the oldest black banks in the country. When I was small, he worked at the bank, at an insurance company, and at the Country Club of Virginia on the weekends, so that he could provide for us. Because he worked at a black bank and eventually became president of the bank, supporting black business was very, very important to him, and therefore important to us.

Everything we did was within the black community. Our doctors were black, even the pharmacies we used were black. Of course, the schools were segregated. So I didn't have a lot of interactions that I remember with any other race.

In seventh grade, my father had a house built on Woodrow Avenue, which is right down the street from Chandler Middle School. I believe we were the first black family in that particular block. When they finished building our house and built the walkway to the steps, somebody wrote 'nigger' on it. They had to redo that part of it. That was just a very weird feeling. Once we moved there, other blacks started moving there, and then of course the whites moved out.

One of the most disappointing things to me and the group of friends I'd grown up with was that the principal at Chandler, who we did not like and thought was very racist, was then sent to John Marshall High School. So we had six years of him. I don't think he was ready for integration, and he just did not treat us that well. There are eight of us who have been friends since first grade; we're still friends. And we talk about this stuff all the time when we get together four or five times a year.

I knew I was going to go to college. One of my friends with whom I'd grown up went to William & Mary with me. I think we were in the third class of blacks. Out of 20 blacks, six of us graduated. William & Mary was like starting all over. It was like Chandler, except it was worse because so many of the whites in college had not gone to school with blacks. And then quite a few of the blacks had not gone to school with whites.

Kappa Alpha was one of the fraternities, I think, that had Confederate flags and things like that during homecoming and other times. I remember protesting. Evidently, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* or *Richmond News Leader* posted my picture a couple of times because I remember my mother saying, "I don't want to see your picture in any more papers." I was pretty outspoken.

Dating was not a very good situation. Because of the small number of blacks, you were fighting over a few boys whom, if you'd been in any other setting, you probably wouldn't even have been interested in, but that's all you had. Sometimes I wish I had not gone there because I would hear my other friends and how much fun they had in school. I didn't have that same type of experience.

I've been in a lot of situations where I was either the first black or the only black on staff or the executive team. The National Institute on Drug Abuse had an internship program where they were trying to get minorities and women in administrative positions instead of always being counselors. I applied and said I wanted to go to the Midwest, so they sent me to Jefferson City, Missouri. That's when *Good Times* and *The Jeffersons* were popular sitcoms. The only view of blacks came from these shows. I found myself constantly explaining things about being black, about black hair, black this and black that because to the people there it was totally new. ■

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Growing Up in Civil Rights Richmond: A Community Remembers was modeled on our 2008 collaboration, *When Janey Comes Marching Home: Portraits of Women Combat Veterans*. Like that project, this one exemplifies a collaborative approach that engaged community members in the most substantive ways, while rendering the outcome with laudable artistic excellence.

We are deeply appreciative of the generosity and resolve of the 30 area residents featured here, who were just as determined as we were to see *Growing Up in Civil Rights Richmond* come to fruition. Above all, this book and exhibition celebrate the courage and conviction that distinguish their personal stories. We are greatly indebted to each participant for contributing in this way to a fuller and more faithful historical narrative of our city, which might best be described, in recent times, as a very slow reveal. Myra Smith, whose contributions to the project are manifold, deserves our special thanks.

We are truly grateful for visual journalist Brian Palmer's commitment to the project. Throughout his career, Brian has tackled many topics that are also key to *Growing Up in Civil Rights Richmond*: racial inequality and injustice, faith and spirituality, and retrieving overlooked or ignored stories that most certainly deserve our

attention. We were fortunate indeed to enlist his collaboration as the photographer for *Growing Up in Civil Rights Richmond*. Over the last year and a half, his insight and artistry have resulted in the stunning photographic portraits seen here, without which neither book nor exhibition would exist.

Our thanks extend also to Brittany Nelson, Assistant Professor of Photography, University of Richmond, who heads the studio Flatten Image, and her associate, Kelsey Dusenka, for producing the exhibition's gorgeous prints; and to Rick Michaels of Rick's Custom Frame for framing them.

We are so pleased to present the exhibition at the Joel and Lila Harnett Museum of Art, University of Richmond Museums. We sincerely thank Richard Waller, Executive Director, and Elizabeth Schlatter, Deputy Director and Curator of Exhibitions, for this opportunity and their enthusiastic support, which also made possible the catalogue's publication. We are grateful, too, for the expert help of museum preparators Stephen Duggins and Henley Guild and Curator of Museum Programs Heather Campbell. We thank Alexandra Byrum, Assistant Director, Communications and UR Downtown, Bonner Center for Civic Engagement, for her continuous support and contributions to the overall project, including the companion exhibition at University of Richmond Downtown's Wilton

Companies Gallery. Thanks go also to essayists Elvatrice Belsches and Michael Paul Williams, whose contributions considerably enhance our understanding of multiple factors leading up to and during the civil rights movement in Richmond.

Growing Up in Civil Rights Richmond was initially inspired, in part, by the sesquicentennial of the American Civil War and Emancipation. This was a time not only to revisit the past, but also to reflect on how the turbulent events that had their genesis in Emancipation have continued to reverberate through the years leading up to the present. The horrific images stemming from the continuing struggle for racial, social, and economic equality that increasingly stigmatize our own era are now no less indelibly imprinted on our minds.

Though the gestation period for *Growing Up in Civil Rights Richmond: A Community Remembers* was much longer than we originally anticipated, its presentation has become timelier and ever more essential in the context of these recent events and the ongoing, often contentious debate occurring on local, regional, and national levels. In light of all of this, the resilience and fortitude expressed by these 30 individuals are cause for both celebration and hope.

— Ashley Kistler & Laura Browder

CONTRIBUTORS

ELVATRICE BELSCHES is a public historian, archival researcher, author, and lecturer. She is the author of *Black America Series: Richmond, Virginia* (Arcadia Publishing, 2002) and several biographical entries for the *African American National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2008). Among her other scholarly activities, she serves as an External Scholar in African American history on the NEH-funded grant to Reynolds Community College, "Transforming Community College Humanities through Local Engagement" (2016-2019), and curated the photographic exhibition *Yesterday's Stories, Today's Inspirations* for the Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia (2017-2018). She has served as a scholarly advisor and archival researcher on several documentary films, and as a researcher on Steven Spielberg's 2012 historical drama, *Lincoln*. She was commissioned to create and narrate the National Park Service's podcast tour of the Jackson Ward Historic Landmark District (2010).

Belsches has lectured nationally on many aspects of African American history, including presentations for the American Civil War Museum's 2016 Teachers Institute, Teaching American History Academy (TAHA) for RPS Educators, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, and Duke/UNC-Chapel Hill's Collaborative Speaker Series on the History of Medicine. She heads Historical Innovations, LLC, and currently has several documentaries and publications in development.

LAURA BROWDER, Tyler and Alice Haynes Professor of American Studies at the University of Richmond, interviewed 52 women from all branches of the military for her most recent book, *When Janey Comes Marching Home: Portraits of Women Combat Veterans*, with photographs by Sascha Pflaeging, which was based on a traveling exhibition of the same title organized by curator Ashley Kistler. She is the writer and executive producer of the 2012 PBS documentary *The Reconstruction of Asa Carter*, based on her book *Slippery Characters: Ethnic Impersonators and American Identities*. Her previous books include *Her Best Shot: Women and Guns in America*, and *Rousing the Nation: Radical Culture in Depression America*, which was named a Choice Outstanding Academic Book. She also edited *With the Weathermen: The Personal Journal of a Revolutionary Woman* by Susan Stern.

For the past nine years, Professor Browder and Patricia Herrera, Associate Professor of Theatre, University of Richmond, along with their students, have been producing documentary dramas and museum exhibitions about Richmond civil rights history, as well as developing the digital archive *The Fight for Knowledge: Civil Rights and Education in Richmond, VA*. She is currently working on a biography of her grandfather, American Communist party leader Earl Browder.

ASHLEY KISTLER is an independent curator, writer, and editor based in Richmond, Virginia, where she has been an integral part of the city's arts community for 35 years. She has served as Director of the Anderson Gallery and Associate Professor, VCU School of the Arts; Curator of the Visual Arts Center of Richmond; and Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

Kistler has organized dozens of exhibitions working with regional, national, and international artists, as well as a broad array of artist-based programs, residencies, commissions, film-video series, and performing arts events. She has authored and/or edited numerous exhibition catalogues and the recent books *Anderson Gallery: 45 Years of Art on the Edge* and *Nancy Blum: Drawing, Sculpture, and Public Works*. Among other awards, she is the recipient of the Distinguished Achievement in Service, VCUarts Faculty Award (2015-2016), Women in the Arts Award (2011); Arts Innovator Award, Theresa Pollak Prizes for Excellence in the Arts (2006); and Currents of Change Award, VCU Council for Community Engagement (2005). She currently serves as vice-chair of Richmond's Public Art Commission.

BRIAN PALMER is a visual journalist, filmmaker, and educator based in Richmond, Virginia. An MFA graduate of the School of Visual Arts in New York, he has lectured widely and taught at University College, Virginia Commonwealth University; University of Richmond; Hampton University; Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University; School of Visual Arts; Baruch College, City University of New York; and Tisch School of the Arts, New York University.

Before going freelance in 2002, Palmer was Beijing bureau chief for *US News & World Report*, a writer for *Fortune*, and a correspondent for CNN. His photographs and articles have appeared in numerous print publications and online news outlets, including *The New York Times*, *The Nation*, *Smithsonian Magazine*, *Huffington Post*, *The Root*, *Mother Jones*, *BuzzFeed*, *Pixel Press*, *Colorlines*, and *Narratively*. In 2008, he was awarded a Ford Foundation grant for *Full Disclosure*, a feature documentary about his three media embeds in Iraq with U.S. Marines from 2004 to 2006, which has since screened at a number of film festivals and on the Documentary Channel.

Palmer and his wife, Erin Hollaway Palmer, are currently developing *Make the Ground Talk*, a documentary evoking life in a historic black community in Virginia that was uprooted during World War II to build a U.S. naval base. Since 2014, they have worked on the restoration of the historic African American East End Cemetery in Henrico County, recording these efforts in photographs, text, and video, and in their 2018 book *The Afterlife of Jim Crow: East End and Evergreen Cemeteries in Photographs*.

MICHAEL PAUL WILLIAMS is a Metro section columnist for the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, where his columns appear every Tuesday and Friday. Widely admired for his incisive commentary on matters relating to race and politics, he came to the newspaper in 1982, serving as a state correspondent in the newspaper's Williamsburg bureau and covering Chesterfield County and Richmond City Hall before starting his column in 1992.

A graduate of Hermitage High School, Virginia Union University, and Northwestern University, Williams won Virginia Press Association awards for column writing in 1992, 1994, 2007, and 2014. During 1999-2000, he was one of a dozen U.S. journalists awarded a Nieman Fellowship at Harvard University. He was the recipient of the 2010 George Mason Award for outstanding contributions to Virginia journalism, given by the Virginia Pro Chapter of the Society for Professional Journalists. The same year, Williams was honored with the John Jasper Trailblazer Award by historic Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church. He was also the recipient of the 2012 Humanitarian Award from the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities and the 2014 Will Rogers Humanitarian Award from the National Society of Newspaper Columnists.



Brian Palmer, *Untitled* [4 May 2018, sign at George Wythe High School, Richmond, Virginia], archival inkjet print on paper, 26.7 x 40 inches, lent courtesy of the artist



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