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2017

Heroes of Richmond: Four Centuries of Courage, Dignity, and Virtue

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Recommended Citation

Allison, Scott T., ed. *Heroes of Richmond: Four Centuries of Courage, Dignity, and Virtue*. Richmond: Palsgrove, 2017.

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HEROES OF RICHMOND:
Four Centuries of Courage, Dignity, and Virtue

EDITED BY
SCOTT T. ALLISON

THE CITY OF RICHMOND, VIRGINIA: A CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL NEXUS OF HEROISM

SCOTT T. ALLISON

On July 1, 1958, the first section of Interstate 95, running north to south in Virginia from Henrico County to Petersburg, was opened to traffic in the city of Richmond. The grand opening was cause for celebration for most citizens and travelers who had endured years of dreadful traffic jams on the old and outdated north-south road, US Route 1. One large group of people who were most definitely *not* celebrating the grand opening of I-95 were the African American citizens of Jackson Ward, a historically black Richmond neighborhood. The noisy, sprawling interstate bisected Jackson Ward in half, effectively dealing the community an economic death blow. For many decades, Jackson Ward was a bustling business district known as the “Wall Street of the South”. It was also a thriving entertainment center, hosting frequent performances by Cab Calloway, Duke Ellington, Lena Horne, Ella Fitzgerald, Nat King Cole, and local sensation Bill “Bojangles” Robinson. The construction of the massive, noisy I-95 decimated the neighborhood and condemned at least two generations of African Americans to abject poverty (Campbell, 2012).

The cruel effects of I-95's division of Jackson Ward were emblematic of the dark, divisive side of Richmond's history. White politicians and white business leaders were the power players behind the decision to position the interstate through Jackson Ward. For them, the fate of the black neighborhood was not a consideration. *Richmond Times-Dispatch* columnist Michael Paul Williams (2015) has observed that "a lot of hard work" went into Richmond's divisions over the years, noting decades of gerrymandering and neglect in creating a vast racial divide. Such was the mindset of the pre-civil rights era South, with pockets of that mindset still at work today throughout America, not just in the South. Human divisions involving race have wracked the city of Richmond and all of the United States for centuries. Of course, race has not been the only basis for tragic human divisions. Other issues that have engendered cruel divisiveness in America, some of which are addressed in the current volume, include ethnicity, age, sex, religion, disability, and sexual orientation.

HEROISM AND UNITY

Heroism has been defined as actions that promote unity and unification in society, not divisiveness (Campbell, 1949). In fact, Allison and Smith (2015) have argued that *whereas heroes seek to unify people, villains seek to divide them*. Virtually all research on heroism is derived from the seminal work of Joseph Campbell, a comparative mythologist who recognized that all hero mythologies across the globe share the same basic elements. One of these elements focuses on the hero's growing recognition that they possess a deep, unifying connection with all the world. Campbell (1972) cites an essay written in 1840 by philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, who observed that the heroically transformed individual has moved "from the lesser, secondary knowledge of himself as separate from others" to "the greater, truer truth, that *we are all one in the ground of our being*" (p. 151, italics added). In short, heroism is a journey from egocentricity to sociocentricity, from elitism to egalitarianism (Allison & Goethals, 2017; Rohr, 2011). Heroes enjoy a feeling of union with others, and they act on that feeling to enhance society. Describing the hero's mindset, Campbell (1949) noted that we all have the ability and the calling to

evolve into heroes who enjoy a state of union with others. "Where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world," he wrote (p. 25).

It was Campbell's (1949) observation that all heroes in literature embark on a hero's journey consisting of three essential stages. First, there is a *departure* stage during which heroes leave their safe, familiar world and venture into the dangerous, unfamiliar world. Sometimes people depart willingly, but most often people are reluctant to leave the comforts of home. Second, the *initiation* stage of the journey refers to the hero's encounter with adversity and villains. Here there is much pain and suffering, and the hero is compelled to seek out friends and mentor figures who assist the hero in becoming transformed into a new, more enlightened individual. Third, the *return* stage refers to the hero's coming back home to the familiar world, only now the transformed hero sees home in a whole new way. In the words of T. S. Eliot (1940), we "are not the same people who left that station". The now-transformed hero gives back to this society, serving others and helping people with their own heroic transformations.

These three phases of the hero's journey are the destiny for all human beings, not just for heroes in literature (Allison & Goethals, 2014, 2016; Eftimiou & Franco, 2017). People possess the breathtaking ability to avoid going on the journey, either because they are unwilling or unable to embark on it. Sadly, avoidance of the journey leaves people stuck in early stages of human development in which their thinking is characterized by entrenched dualities such as "us" versus "them" (Allison & Goethals, 2017; Rohr, 2011). This unenlightened mindset, preoccupied with human divisions, only produces pain. As Rohr (2011) notes, if people don't transform their pain, they will transmit it. Transformation is key, and transformation can only happen by embarking on the hero's journey of enlightenment. Buddhists and Hindus call the process exactly that: enlightenment. Those in 12-step programs call it an awakening. The ancient Greeks called it metamorphosis. Christians call it salvation or resurrection, and other religions sometimes name it liberation or conversion. Secular terms include consciousness and transformation, but regardless of the label, it refers to the sense of connection to all people and the calling to behave in ways that build those connections.

Heroism requires a mindset of unification with the world, but as I have mentioned, heroes in our society are a rare breed because of people's natural aversion to undergoing heroic transformation. Carl Jung (1970) was a psychoanalyst keenly aware of the sources of most people's everyday pain and anguish. Jung wrote that, "There is no coming to consciousness without pain." Jung's theorizing about the human psyche reveals his belief that to become a mature, healthy, enlightened individual, a person must either be willing or forced by circumstances beyond her control to travel the hero's journey. Such a journey inevitably involves some form of sacrifice and suffering (Allison & Setterberg, 2016). Both Jung and Joseph Campbell (1988) believed that the epidemic of anxiety and depression in modern society stems from people's habitual tendency to avoid the painful transformative journey of growth. Jung observed that "the foundation of all mental illness is the avoidance of true suffering", and that "neurosis is always a substitute for legitimate suffering." Jung (1970) even went so far to say that a person's avoidance of transformative suffering "deprives him of his wholeness and *imposes a painful fragmentariness* on his life." In short, divisiveness is the inevitable result of the pain associated with avoiding the hero's journey.

RICHMOND AS A NEXUS OF HEROISM AND VILLAINY

How does this discussion of psychological pain relate to heroism in Richmond? I argue here that the city of Richmond has been mired in a pre-transformative state for centuries. As with most of the world, and certainly much of our nation, Richmond lived by the rule of divisiveness from its inception in 1737 until the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, and beyond. For its first 120 years, Richmond was a major center of human slave-trading and human slave trafficking. The city became the Capital of the Confederacy during the nation's most divisive war, and following that war Richmond had the opportunity to grow into a more enlightened, racially egalitarian society -- but chose not to. In fact, Richmond, along with much of the South, avoided transformative growth for a century following the Civil War by adopting corrupt Reconstruction policies and segregationist Jim Crow laws.

For Richmond, the result of centuries of institutionalized divisiveness has been a deep pain long felt by its African American citizens – pain resulting from poverty, crime, drug addiction, and an entrenched sense of hopelessness, all passed along from generation to generation. The city has paid a steep price for avoiding solutions to that pain. Carl Jung knew that avoiding pain only amplifies it. “The things we do to avoid pain are always worse in the end than the pain itself,” he wrote (Eldredge, 2016). The city itself has been on a stunted hero’s journey. Its geography, culture, and economy all conspired to ensnare it in the pernicious world of slavery and racial oppression. All heroes are missing an important inner quality that they need to either discover or recover for transformation to occur. For four centuries, the city of Richmond’s missing inner quality, the one necessary to ameliorate most of its pain, has been inclusiveness and communion.

Most heroes on their journey have to hit some sort of “rock bottom” before transformation is possible. Campbell (1949) called this rock bottom “being in the belly of the whale”. The Civil War and its devastating aftermath should have been the city of Richmond’s “rock bottom,” the catalyst for a wondrous transformative experience toward union and communion. But like an addict who cannot give up his drug, the city fought to maintain its divisive and discriminatory practices under the guise of “separate but equal” Jim Crow laws and segregationist gerrymandering. These practices kept people of color in poverty for a century after the Civil War ended, and so the city’s pain has lingered far longer and more deeply than it should have.

The good news is that where there is pain, there are heroes who will step up to offer salve for the pain. And where there are villains causing the pain, there are heroes who will step up to vanquish those villains. This book showcases the work of such heroes. The city of Richmond’s heroic transformation is clearly a work in progress. While the city still contains unsavory vestiges of its racially divisive past, there have been good signs of transformative progress. Richmond has become a magnet for members of the millennial generation who are known to have more progressive and inclusive attitudes (Allison, 2017). The city has also garnered magazine awards for its quality of life, affordability, and cuisine (Warder, 2017). Richmond has a long way to go toward conquering its divisiveness but has come a long way, thanks

to the heroic work of leaders and legends such as those individuals who are featured in this volume.

THE GENESIS OF THIS BOOK

The present volume is unique in that it is authored entirely by undergraduates at the University of Richmond. Most impressively, the outstanding chapters contained here were penned by 18-year-old first-year students, most of whom grew up outside of Virginia and none of whom were familiar with theories and research in the field of heroism science until a few weeks before they composed their chapters. As with most bright young people, these student authors have been mentored by heroes, are highly inspired by heroes, and aspire to make a positive difference in the world. Judging from my experience as their instructor, and based on the quality of their analyses of the 16 heroes contained in this book, I have no doubt that these student authors are poised to make heroic contributions in their own lives.

My motivations for editing a student-authored volume are quite frankly 80% selfish and 20% selfless. After 30 years as a college instructor, I entered the Fall semester of the 2016 academic year with a desire to shake things up a bit. Trying something new keeps us all fresh and enthusiastic, after all. Besides offering a novel teaching experience, the prospect of editing a student-authored book seemed like it would be fun, and also a challenge. In retrospect, it has been both of these. The preparation of this volume also provided new opportunities for different types of faculty-student interactions and collaborations, which I have enjoyed immensely. Moreover, I am aware of today's competitive job market as well as the competitive application process for entry into graduate and professional schools. If providing these 16 students with a scholarly outcome to insert into their CVs helps them in any small way, I am grateful. Most importantly, guiding students through the process of publishing this book has had the educational value of introducing them to the process of creating publishable scholarship. Achieving this goal, alone, has made the long process to putting together this book worth it.

The 16 student contributors to this volume were enrolled in a First Year Seminar entitled *Heroes and Villains* at the University of Richmond. First Year Seminars are discipline-based, writing intensive courses for new students. As the website describes them, “First-Year Seminars introduce students to academic inquiry and the modes of expression that lie at the heart of a liberal arts education” (First Year Seminars, 2017). I was happy to discover that publishing a book with First Year Seminar students helped satisfy many of the course’s stated goals. These goals include: (1) Expand and deepen students’ understanding of the world and of themselves; (2) Enhance their ability to read and think critically; (3) Enhance their ability to communicate effectively, in writing, speech, and other appropriate forms; (4) Develop the fundamentals of information literacy and library research; and (5) Provide the opportunity for students to work closely with a faculty mentor. With regard to the second goal above, it is clear that my student authors improved their skills in evaluation, interpretation and analysis of texts and other forms of expression. With regard to the fourth goal, my student authors strengthened their information literacy, scouring for sources in obscure places with the help of our remarkably talented social science reference librarian at Richmond, Sojourna Cunningham.

The method that my students and I used to choose the heroes for this book involved several stages. First, the students were assigned the task of generating a large master list of names of Richmond heroes for possible inclusion in the volume. The goal was to brainstorm as many heroes as possible, knowing we would eventually cull the list down to 16. To make this generation task easier, students were then divided into groups with each group assigned different category of heroism. The categories we chose are reflected in this volume’s table of contents; they include the categories of *political heroes*, *educational heroes*, *entertainment heroes*, *activist heroes*, and *selfless heroes*. To ensure that we cast as wide a net as possible, one group of students was charged with generating a list of heroes that extended beyond these potentially limiting categories.

Students utilized many sources to generate our master list of heroes. These sources included the university library, public libraries, the Virginia Historical Society, popular media, encyclopedias, newspapers, news magazines, the

internet, and many different types of online data bases, to name but a few. The resultant master list contained over fifty names of heroes, including: Henry Marsh, Oliver Hill, Maggie Lena Walker, Dorothy Height, Naomi Silverman Cohn, Edward Virginias Valentine, Edgar Allen Poe, John Barton Payne, Leslie Cheek, William Byrd I, William Byrd II, William Mayo, John Smith, Chief Powhatan, John Mitchell Jr., Lawrence Douglas Wilder, Manley Caldwell Butler, Mary Sue Terry, Andrew Jackson, John Jasper, Jacob I. Cohen, Pocahontas, Arthur Ashe, Patrick Henry, Virginia E. Randolph, Anna Julia Cooper, Virginius Dabney, Douglas Southall Freeman, Melody C. Barnes, May Keller, Charles Morrison, Bobby Ukrop, Mary Walker, Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, Tim Kaine, Linwood Holton, James H. Dooley, John Marshall, E. Claiborne Robins and Lara Robins, Nina Abady, Sidney Lewis, Jon Lugalbil, J. Harwood Cochrane, Lewis Ginter, and Ellen Glasgow.

From here, we engaged in lively and at times heated discussions about which 16 heroes from this master list would make the final cut for the book. We did our best to hold ourselves to established scholarly criteria for heroism (Allison & Goethals, 2011; Allison, Goethals, & Kramer, 2017; Franco & Zimbardo, 2006; Franco et al., 2011; Goethals & Allison, 2012; Kinsella et al., 2015). The central question we posed about each individual was: Did this person make noteworthy self-sacrifices and take substantial risks in performing actions that significantly enhanced and unified society? We do not make the claim that our final list of 16 heroes in any way represent Richmond’s greatest all-time heroes, as surely a different class of students operating from even a somewhat contrasting definitional perspective on heroism might have generated an entirely different list of individuals. Still, my students and I were satisfied with the final grouping and are proud to present our analyses of these 16 legends of Richmond.

In winnowing our master list down to 16 individuals, we did take steps to ensure some demographic balance among our heroes. Accomplishing a gender balance proved difficult, as the 50-item master list of heroes was heavily skewed toward men, reflecting the fact that women historically have been denied opportunities for heroism (Hoyt, 2014; Eagly & Carli, 2007). As the city of Richmond has experienced significant racial issues throughout most of its history, we had no problem achieving a balance between European

American and African American heroes. One of our heroes, Pocahontas, was of Native American ancestry, and there is no doubting the fact that this book is missing instances of exemplary heroism performed by Native Americans before Europeans arrived on the continent. Still, we did our best to choose an exceptional group of 16 heroes whose remarkable feats are worthy of analysis from a heroism science perspective.

OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS IN THIS VOLUME

This volume, *Heroes of Richmond: Four Centuries of Courage, Dignity, and Virtue*, has assembled scholarly contributions about Richmond's heroic past from a distinguished group of undergraduate students at the University of Richmond. Our volume begins with a thoughtful Foreword by Mary Kelly Tate, who serves as the Director of the School of Law's Institute for Actual Innocence, a program devoted to identifying and exonerating wrongfully convicted individuals in Virginia. Professor Tate is also the Coordinator of the First Year Seminar program at Richmond. When I approached her with the idea of assembling a student-authored book, I received her steadfast support and encouragement. Her leadership in her role as Coordinator of the First Year Seminars has been inspiring and exemplary, and I consider her a wonderful friend and stimulating colleague. She has my utmost admiration for her contributions in exonerating innocent people who have been wrongfully convicted. Professor Tate is a hero in my eyes, a person who clearly understands the city of Richmond's painful history of division. She touches upon this theme in her Foreword, describing Richmond as "a city riven and enlivened by America's racial, artistic, gender, political and economic fault lines." I hope you take a few moments to read her thoughtful reflections in her Foreword to this volume.

The main body of the *Heroes of Richmond* is partitioned into five conceptually distinct sections that reflect the broad range of heroism in the city of Richmond's history. These sections are *Iconic Heroes*, *Activist Heroes*, *Educator Heroes*, *Political Heroes*, and *Selfless Heroes*. Below we briefly highlight the contributors and content of each of these sections.

ICONIC HEROES

Our volume commences with a section entitled *Iconic Heroes*, which focuses on Richmond heroes whose remarkable achievements have earned them iconic status. Jonathan Anthony Ohlmann leads us off with an analysis of William Byrd II's heroic founding of the city of Richmond. Ohlmann shares with us how Byrd II embarked on the classic hero's journey from an ostracized politician of England to an inspirational leader of the colony of Virginia. Next, Meghan N. Dillon offers a compelling chapter on the heroic life contributions of Pocahontas. Dillon makes the bold contention that without Pocahontas' heroic wisdom, strength, and mentorship, the state of Virginia and the city of Richmond would not exist as the thriving economic and cultural forces that they are today.

The next chapter, authored by Michael David Bonifonte, captures the heroism of Edgar Allan Poe. According to Bonifonte, Poe embodied the traits of a hero, travelled the hero's journey throughout his life, took on the role of an underdog, inspired countless people through his writing, and lived and worked with a purpose, one that led him to his calling and his heroism. The final chapter in this section on iconic Richmond heroes is authored by Carlie Q. Blessing, who writes about the heroism of tennis great Arthur Ashe. Ashe broke down racial barriers in the sport of tennis and is considered one of the greatest athletes of all-time. He was a major participant in the anti-apartheid movement and he made the world aware of the inequality that existed on a large stage, forcing changes to occur. Ashe also handled the burden of AIDS with grace, inspiring millions with his courage.

ACTIVIST HEROES

Social activists are defined as individuals who take heroic actions to bring about much-needed social change. Although only two Richmond social activist heroes appear in this volume, it should be emphasized that several other heroes who receive coverage in other categories of heroism in this book could easily have been placed in this activist section. Our first chapter in this activist category is authored by Josh A. Trauberman, who offers a close examination

of the heroic life of John Mitchell, Jr. There is no doubt that Mitchell, Jr. had tremendous moral courage, publishing articles in his newspaper that threatened the racist status quo of his era. Mitchell, Jr. lived his life in accordance with his edict, "Don't cringe and cower. Demand your rights with dignity, and all will be well."

Next, Kathryn K. Lynch offers a powerful analysis of the heroism of Oliver Hill, the courageous attorney who waged war on the insufferable "separate but equal" doctrine that undermined the quality of life for countless African Americans throughout the South, including the city of Richmond. Hill's entire life was dedicated to eradicating societal norms that were designed to keep him from conducting such an eradication. Lynch identifies several traits of Hill's that contributed to his heroism, among them intelligence, passion, ambition, selflessness, and diligence in the pursuit of justice and equality.

EDUCATOR HEROES

Our section of educator heroes begins with Brendan J. Griswold's chapter on the heroism of Maggie Lena Walker, whose innovations and commitment to the educational opportunities for African Americans is legendary. At Walker's funeral, she was eulogized as "a woman of unusual attainments. She possessed a remarkable personality, business ability to a marked degree and a love for humanity, particularly for the people of her own race, which was the ruling passion of her life." Next, Declan J. Horrigan offers a chapter on the heroism of Virginia Randolph. Horrigan describes how Randolph improved the quality of education for tens of thousands of African American children, immeasurably enhancing an entire society. Her contributions to the school system in Virginia were invaluable and transformative. Our final chapter in this section on educator heroes is penned by Aliya J Sultan, who provides a fascinating account of the heroism of May Keller, the first woman academic dean at a Virginia University. Keller singlehandedly transformed educational opportunities for women in Virginia and made an indelible impact on thousands of women who attended the University of Richmond.

POLITICAL HEROES

Our section on the political heroes of Richmond begins with a chapter by Bailey A. Gillespy on the heroism of Patrick Henry. Gillespy notes that Henry owed his rise to heroism to his ability to recognize his own prodigious oratory skills. We see in this chapter how Henry's heroic journey led him to his iconic "Give me liberty or give me death!" speech that forever changed the fate of America. Next, Emmalyn G. Dressel supplies a compelling analysis of the heroism of John Marshall. Dressel describes the many ways that Marshall's early life experiences shaped, strengthened, and prepared him for his heroic role as the fourth Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States.

The next chapter in this section, authored by Janell M. Spigner, focuses on the heroism of Douglas Wilder, the first African American to be elected governor of the United States in 1990. As with many heroes featured in this book, Wilder had to overcome significant barriers to achieve his life purpose of helping others who are in need. As Wilder once said, "We are still in ascendancy, because the journey doesn't stop here...We shall overcome." The final chapter in this section on political heroes is authored by Thomas J. Villani, who offers an analysis of the heroism of Mary Sue Terry. Villani describes Terry's remarkable life journey, detailing how she overcame her small-town upbringing to achieve her larger than life goal to help improve the lives of people throughout Virginia.

SELFLESS HEROES

Our final section in this book focuses on the category of selfless heroes. First, Morgan E. Caron offers an analysis of a fascinating unsung hero named Mary Elizabeth Bowser, a slave who worked for Jefferson Davis and his wife while spying on them in the service of the Union Army. Next, Lauren J. Weingarten provides an enthralling account of the heroism of E. Claiborne Robins and Lora Robins, two tremendous benefactors of the University of Richmond. The Robins' philanthropy transformed a campus, a faculty, a student body, and countless people who call Richmond home. Finally, Mikaela Rosen illuminates the heroism of three great unsung heroes in Richmond's history:

Gilbert Hunt, Elizabeth Van Lew, and Sally Tompkins. Rosen provides a riveting account of their invisible heroism and makes the case that it is incumbent upon us, as 21st-century citizens, to bring into the light these unsung heroes' accomplishments.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS BEFORE WE GET STARTED

It is my deepest hope that this collection of essays about Richmond heroes offers you, the reader, some enjoyment, insights, and inspiration about the zenith of human behavior in the capital city of Virginia. The chapters in this volume reflect the landscape of what we currently know about heroism-related phenomena, as they encompass such diverse topics as courage, empathy, resilience, hope, meaning, purpose, spirituality, morality, altruism, character strengths, wisdom, development, regeneration, and transformation. In wrapping up this introduction to the book, I'd like to share some of the thoughts about the city of Richmond as expressed by Benjamin Campbell, one of the city's spiritual leaders. In his book, *Richmond's Unhealed History*, Campbell (2012) minces no words in describing Richmond's shameful and divisive past, the progress made toward healing the great divisions, and some hope for the future.

Regarding the city's history of divisiveness, Campbell observes that "there are significant issues still to be dealt with from the metropolitan city's strange history, *but they are difficult to talk about*" (p. 207). Moreover, Campbell adds, "Here, at the beginning of Richmond's fifth century as a multiracial settlement, the choice can be made to seek a great future, *or to surrender to an inner enemy far more destructive than any race or class or nation*" (p. 210). He concludes: "Many in metropolitan Richmond... want to complete now... the establishment of a great city based on our original principles, *making possible a genuine citizenship that serves the common wealth...* It is *the ultimate redemption* of Richmond's unhealed history" (p. 216).

If we look closely at Campbell's (2012) observations about Richmond, we can clearly see the continuing need for heroic leadership, both in the present

day and in the future. In the above quotations, I have highlighted several key points in italics. First, Campbell emphasizes the *difficulty* in talking about “significant issues” that need addressing in the city of Richmond. Difficulty can never be a deterrent to proper action. If there is one central guiding principle of heroism, it is that heroes do what is right even when it is difficult (Allison et al., 2017). Second, Campbell observes correctly that making the right choice is imperative; otherwise, we “*surrender to an inner enemy far more destructive*” than anything we can imagine. Richmond’s inner enemy is its long-established history of divisiveness that has brought pain and suffering for centuries. If Richmond is on a transformative journey toward heroic unification – and there are ample signs that this is indeed the case -- then city leaders and citizens must make choices that promote healing unification, not division.

Finally, Campbell (2012) reveals glimpses of optimism, noting that many Richmonders are poised to take unifying actions on the city’s behalf, “making possible a genuine citizenship that serves the *common wealth*”. Invoking this pun about the Commonwealth of Virginia, Campbell touches upon achieving the heroic ideal of universal connection of all races, genders, ethnicities, orientations, and abilities. Campbell calls the fulfillment of this heroic ideal “the ultimate redemption of Richmond.” Indeed, it has been said that every hero’s journey is a journey toward redemption, a journey toward reconciliation and making things right that have once been very wrong. Campbell is correct in noting that Richmond’s history has been “strange” in the sense that it has been self-destructive, but self-destructive tendencies have long been characteristic of the human race. This current volume on Richmond’s heroes places on vivid display the heroism that has been borne of self-destructiveness. What the city needs now, more than ever, is heroism borne of self- and other-constructiveness. We dedicate this book to that heroic vision.

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