



**REIMAGINING RICHMOND:
Using our Shared History to Make Connections and Bridge Divides**

by

Regional History Immersion Team 2022

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Richmond has a storied and complex history. Our shared story begins in a place belonging to Indigenous peoples, on the ancestral lands of the Powhatan Confederacy and the Monacan Nation, and encompasses complex issues involving multiple and diverse groups, Richmonders of today and of times past. Through our immersion experience, we learned that the process of discovering and understanding *our shared history* will lay the groundwork for more effective communication – an imperative if we are to effectively take on the longstanding problems that affect our region today. Our goal is to encourage YOU to participate in this work, and to reflect on that experience with others, *especially those “outside” your regular circles*, and to encourage those in your own communities to do the same, and to be a part of our success story.

JOURNEY

Inwardly, our team toured many of the region’s museums and interviewed their leaders; we read and analyzed historical documents and maps; we interviewed leaders in disciplines who work with our history (through art, racial healing, education, tourism and media); we observed how various groups have contributed to our collective history; and we discovered little-known facts and stories about our region that undoubtedly affect our attitudes about one another today. Our team met weekly and constantly shared research and experiences while engaging in thoughtful discussions. The result was a camaraderie where each individual felt a part of the group. Friendships developed, grace was given to each person and our diverse group developed a remarkable flow.

Outwardly, we asked several regional leaders a few simple questions: (i) what places or experiences do those of us living and working in or visiting the Richmond region have to know about, (ii) why is this history pivotal and how does this impact us today, and (iii) how do we share this history with each other and with future generations, and what role should schools, communities, and others play? We were struck by a simple yet powerful recurring theme: *meaningful engagement with our true history and the human stories that make it breeds empathy, facilitates connection, and bridges divides.*

FINDINGS

We are in an unprecedented moment: 2+ years of a global pandemic; heightened economic challenges; increasing terrorism by white supremacists and the normalization of their ideals; divisiveness in our country; disdain in our state house and school board

meetings; distress about sending our children to school; distrust in our neighborhoods; even disputes around our kitchen tables. The ability of people on different “sides” to come together to have a rational, fact-based conversation about *anything* feels more difficult than ever. The gulf between ‘us’ and ‘them’ seems to be widening as our ability to bridge the gap grows more challenging, making it impossible to effectively address our most pressing issues.

Yet, we, RICHMOND, are also in a moment of enormous *opportunity*. Many of our city’s current challenges and issues are deeply and undeniably rooted in our complex history. Richmond is unique in that it has 400+ years of American history in one place, much of which is within about a mile’s diameter – *there’s really nothing like it anywhere*. In this inflection point, we found that there is an immense opportunity to engage with our history in order to emerge better and stronger because of that work. And since the history of this place is one that reflects the problems and divisions in America as a nation, Richmond has the opportunity to become a magnet for those outside of our region to come visit Richmond to engage with our shared history.

People of every race, creed and color crave connection and they crave success stories. And we believe the work we are asking YOU to do has the power to do just that.

The challenge for Richmonders now is to discover that history, much of which is not visible (think of the African burial ground and Monument Avenue). In so doing, we must do the personal work of grappling with how these stories affect our own personal attitudes and beliefs, and what we can learn about ourselves and our communities and our shared future, by asking critical questions and having thoughtful conversations about these issues with others.

CALL TO ACTION

We want YOU to plan a staycation! (No, seriously.) In this time of electronic media, it is important to have physical experiences of historical sites, because these have a power that mark people in a way that nothing else does. To jumpstart your engagement with our complex history, we have prepared a weekend itinerary for you, along with questions for reflection and discussion. Contact LMR for details.

We hope you take this opportunity to learn more about our Richmond region, to be reflective in the process, and to share that experience with others. In this time, of hyper-polarization and hyper-politicization at the national level, imagine if the 2,467 graduates of LMR were to **lead the way** in this work here in Richmond, and to encourage their own circles to do the same? The ask is small, and we hope you decide to jump in and be a part of this important engagement and learn something about a person or community in our region that is unfamiliar to you today. We thank you in advance for YOUR role in this important work of facilitating connections and bridging divides.

THANKS TO THE FOLLOWING LEADERS WHO SHARED THEIR EXPERTISE

- Jack Berry (President, Richmond Region Tourism)
- Jamie Bosket (President & CEO, Virginia Museum of History and Culture)
- Reverend Ben Campbell (Executive Director, Richmond Hill)

- Jessica Delbridge (Visitor Services Manager, The Valentine)
- Ana Edwards (Chair, Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project)
- Terry Menefee-Gau, (Director of Community Engagement, VPM)
- Hamilton Glass (Creator and Founder, Mending Walls RVA)
- Danita Rountree Green (Co-Founder and Co-CEO, Coming Together Virginia, formerly known as Coming to the Table RVA)
- Mary C. Lauderdale (Manager, Black History Museum & Cultural Center of Virginia)
- Bill Martin (Director, The Valentine)
- Mason Mills (Executive Producer, VPM)
- Cristina Ramirez (Library Manager, Henrico County Public Libraries)
- Dr. Karen Sherry (Curator, Virginia Museum of History and Culture)
- Stephen Wilson (Executive Director, St. John's Church Foundation)