

# Richmond's Unhealed History - Self Guided Study

Richmond is a city and a story. An epic drama filled with intrigue, ambition, and tragedy. There are heroes and villains, epic accomplishments and stories of violent injustice. It's in our soil, the buildings we drive by, the highways we drive on. But it is a story profoundly unknown by Richmond's occupants today.

Reading *Richmond's Unhealed History* invites us to be a part of the story - to understand the history and to ask God what our part is in Richmond's story going forward. This self-guided study is meant to provoke thought as you prayerfully read through this story. Please do so with humility and an open mind. Ask God to challenge your perspectives, tender your heart, and inspire you to be an active part of the story moving forward.

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## Self Guided Study Part 1 - Colonial Era - Ch 1-3 - "Owning Land"

"European explorers in the New World were acting in accordance with what has been called the doctrine of discovery, a prevailing attitude in Europe that European "Christian" Nations were entitled to claim as our own property not held by any other European "Christian" Nations." (p. 4-5)

### Study

Stories and their underlying narratives shape our worldviews. They communicate causes and consequences, they tell us who the heroes and villains are. All of this shapes our perceptions of our present story. Look for each of these "characters" as you read and the narratives that are formed around them.

- Powhatan and Pocahontas
- The Virginia Company (not often seen as a character in the story)
- John Smith, John Rolfe, Christopher Newport
- Lord De La Warr (p. 23-24)

### Reflection

What are the narratives that shape our worldview?

- Who are the heroes in our story? Are we always the hero in our stories?
- How much of the narrative is shaped by those that get to write it?

Who are the "others" in our life/society? Who is the "savage"?

- How do we perceive them?

- What are our perceptions based off of?
- What have been our interactions with them to date?
- What does God have to say about the “others” of society?

### **Confession / Prayer**

Lord give me the insight and courage to reevaluate my narratives and understand our history, the stories that tell me what is true about our world. Help me to love the “others” in my circles, and if there are none, give me new circles.

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### **Self Guided Study Part 2 - Antebellum Era - Ch 4-6 - “Owning people”**

“Sometime in the middle of the 1640s the 1650s, the death rate began to subside. Virginia’s English population jumped from 14,000 to 25,000 in just seven years, between 1653 and 1660. But by that time, the highly stratified, mostly enslaved society was about to explode.” p.62

“For the first three quarters of the century, although the Englishman who were developing Virginia desired labor badly, they sought it primarily from England rather than from Africa...The death rate was so high and the price of labor so low that there was no need to seek the more expensive African slave labor being imported into the West Indies.” p.67

### **Study**

What happens when we start to decide which humans are more important than others? How does our self-interest drive us to find stratification where there was none? We do it in every room we walk into, every meeting we have, every neighborhood we move into. Lets ask God to help us “step outside of ourselves” and give us new insight about our motivations and intentions.

Virginia’s caste system, grading humans - Indians, Africans, indentured Whites, and the “Great Men” (p. 61-63).

Use of “Christians” to describe ethnicity (whites), classification of humans (p. 63)

The perils of Christianity as the state religion and justification of genocide (p. 72)

The "conversion" of the Christian Church to the mindsets and injustices of society/government (1790-1835) p. 81,92

- Where has society "converted" the church in present day?
- Does the bubble you live in reinforce or challenge these narratives?

## Reflection

Taxonomies of Privilege - attributes we use to determine "who gets what"

- Almost always defined by the people on top (power defines power)
- What are the taxonomies of our day (housing, jobs, voting, salary, citizenship)
- Who are the "Great Men" of our society?
- **Who did Jesus say was "great"? (Matt 23:11)**

Sins of omission - when do power structures make those in power ambivalent to injustice? (p.78) We probably don't think about us having "power" but in many spaces we might have privileges or advantages that we don't think about. Where does this give us advantages over others for reasons in the perceived/actual absence of merit?

- Where does ambivalence look more like willful ignorance? p.122
- **What does Jesus say about those in power and true power looks like?**

"We have a wolf by the ear" (p. 88-89) - Read Thomas Jefferson's letter and reflect on the false choice between justice and self-preservation. Should our own self-interest hinder us from doing what is right?

- **What does Jesus say about self-preservation? (Luke 17:33)**

"Is it possible for healing to take place? How? What are the mechanisms? To what degree is the current migration of metropolitan Richmond due to an unconscious flight from trauma, fear, and guilt? To what extent are the presently depressed citizens of the city the unconscious heirs of the trauma and abuse?" p.123

## Confession / Prayer

Lord we grieve over past centuries of injustice, we grieve it in our midst today. Tell me how I can use my gifts to bring about justice where there is none. Give me courage where obedience means trail or sacrifice.

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**Self Guided Study Part 3 - Jim Crow Era - Ch 7-8 - "Owning Institutions"**

Richmond walking with a limp - Now we start to see how decisions and events that happened centuries or decades ago influence our present today. Read through these sections with an honest understanding that it took a lot of time and effort to get where we are today (good and bad). It will, prayerfully and with God's help, take time and effort to get us where we need to be.

"But the shape of the changes in the second half of the century was deeply affected by the segregated foundation laid in the first half of the century. The troubles that still afflict the culture of metropolitan Richmond have their roots in the problems long denied, change is not attempted, prophecy unheeded, injustice unacknowledged." - p150

## **Study**

Codifying racism into our societal institutions

- Voting (p. 137-140) - the concept of disenfranchisement
- Transportation (p. 141) - bus routes and sidewalks
- Schools (p. 134-35, 145-147) - neglected from the beginning
- Housing (p. 143, 152-160) - "urban renewal", redlining, and "white flight"
- Employment (p. 147) - wage disparity and the segregation of management roles

Where do we see the effects of this today?

- Voting rights - for who is it easy or hard to vote?
- Mass transit / owning a car - how has the city/region been designed?
- "Good" vs "Bad" neighborhoods - who lives in which and why?
- "Good" vs "Bad" schools - is this a function of our neighborhoods?
- Employment - how diverse is your workplace?

## **Reflection**

- Where do systems work for us personally? Where does "doing nothing" not affect us? If it doesn't affect us, do we still have a responsibility?
- Where does the system not work for "the others" we reflected on earlier?
- How much of the Bible talks about helping "the others" when the system doesn't work for them?

## **Confession / Prayer**

Lord, give us the courage to recognize where present systems work for certain groups and not for others. Show me where I can use the advantages afforded to me to bless others. Move in the systems that govern and guide our region to increase justice and add to the flourishing of our neighbors.

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## **Self Guided Study Part 4 - Modern Era - Ch 9 - "Owning the Future"**

"358 years after the first Africans arrived in Virginia and were sold as slaves, the white legislature of Commonwealth grudgingly handed over the leadership of its capital city, the former capital of the Confederacy, to the descendants of enslaved Africans." (p176)

"Even while black leaders sought to provide responsible and effective continuity of government to Virginia's capital city, their efforts were being subverted. Some of the forces were the direct result of the actions of Virginia's last segregationist general assembly and successors." (p. 181)

### **Study - Cause and Effect**

Think about how the contours of the debate around metropolitan segregation affected issues in the region that resonate to today. Read about a variety of these issues in the following sections. Which one captures your heart? Where would God call you to be more actively engaged?

- Sprawl (p183-184)
- Trains (p184)
- Roads (p185)
- Light Rail (p186)
- Bus (p186)
- Banks (p187)
- Schools (p200-205)

"The defacto segregation of the schools continued to be the single most powerful element keeping the jurisdictions of metropolitan Richmond separate from one another. Public education remain the screen upon which the unresolved racial issues of the metropolitan cities history were projected." (p. 205)

### **Reflection**

- Does knowing how these past issues affect our present help us in dealing with issues today?
- Does context and history give us a better perspective? What do we do about it?
- What will you do about it? How could you get your Parish Group involved?

### **Confession / Prayer**

Lord, teach us from our past how we should act going forward. What do you have to tell me, what do you want me to do? Can I grieve the injustices that have happened in the past and be a part of your righteous purposes moving forward?

**"If my people, who are called by my name humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and heal their land." - 2 Chron 7:13-14**

We pray that you leave this study different than where you left it. It can seem really daunting where to start and how to learn more. First, pray to God for guidance and direction. Search your heart for the issues and stories that capture you. Then talk with your Parish Group leaders about ways to get involved. Finally, you can contact the Missions Team for more ways to get involved.

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