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Interpreting the War Anew: An Appraisal of Richmond's Civil War Centennial Commemoration

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at
Virginia Commonwealth University.

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Abstract

INTERPRETING THE WAR ANEW: AN APPRAISAL OF RICHMOND'S CIVIL WAR CENTENNIAL COMMEMORATION

By Brandon P. Butterworth, M.A.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2012

Major Director: Dr. John T. Kneebone, Ph.D., Associate Professor, History Department

In existence from 1959 to 1965, the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee was formed for the purpose of planning and executing Richmond's Civil War centennial commemoration. In this thesis, the author will examine the history of the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee (RCWCC) and its efforts to develop a new historical narrative of Richmond and the Civil War. This paper will assess Richmond's previous attempts to commemorate the Civil War and will argue that the RCWCC contributed to the advancement of Richmond's Civil War narrative by de-emphasizing past Confederate celebration attempts led by heritage groups and advancing a "reconciliation" narrative. Furthermore, this thesis will examine Richmond's current attempt to commemorate the Civil War sesquicentennial and explore the influence of the RCWCC on this effort. Lastly, this paper will consider the future prospects for Civil War commemoration in Richmond.

Introduction

Writing in an editorial entitled “The Opportunity of ’61-’65” in the *Richmond News-Leader*, James J. Kilpatrick recognized the unique opportunity rapidly approaching the former capital of the Confederacy. The year 1961, then two years away, would mark the beginning of the centennial of the Civil War and generate great interest in the events that once ripped the nation asunder. Richmond had much to offer, argued Kilpatrick, and the city must be prepared to capitalize on the occasion. The *News-Leader*’s controversial editor wrote, “The South has something to say to these visitors from elsewhere in the Union. There are deep and meaningful lessons to be drawn from the terrible conflict waged for Southern independence—lessons in history, in law, in the meaning of defeat. The important thing is for Richmond to get started, now, on active planning, fund-raising, the preparation of a calendar of events, designed to draw visitors from throughout the country.”¹

However, after four years of commemoration and almost as many years of planning by the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee, many of Richmond’s residents were left trying to determine exactly what their city had commemorated. A well-intentioned endeavor to remember the Civil War was hindered by conflicts that the centennial planners did not anticipate or understand. As the group’s timing collided with the rise of the civil rights movement, their efforts to commemorate the past seemed awkward, at times even archaic. Genuine attempts at learning lessons in history and the law, as Kilpatrick suggested, seemed like opportunities to

¹ “The Opportunity of 61-65,” *Richmond News-Leader*, 30 April 1959.

highlight fragile relations between the races and perceived inequities in the legal system, rather than on constitutional questions, such as state sovereignty, secession, and nullification.

As Richmond now grapples with its past during the sesquicentennial of the American Civil War, this paper plans to assess Richmond's Civil War centennial commemoration and determine what impact this commemoration had on shaping the city's collective memory of its role in the event. No location and no group of people deserve greater consideration than those residents of the former Confederate capital. For them, the war and its legacy were real and enduring. The centennial should have been a major moment in time. Yet, centennial events failed to sustain the interests of many Richmond natives, prompting questions regarding the role, or lack thereof, of the centennial commemoration in shaping public memory. By examining Richmond's commemoration activities, particularly those of the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee, I hope to determine how that group affected public memory of the war in Richmond.

Talks about how the city of Richmond would address the Civil War centennial began in earnest in the late 1950's. As the anniversary neared, the city's desire to direct the focus of commemorations and to capitalize on possible financial windfalls increased. In 1959, Richmond City Council created the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee and appointed its first seven members. In subsequent years, the committee's members changed as did the number of seats on the committee.²

Appointed by Richmond's mayor, the Honorable Scott Anderson, in April of 1959 were J. Ambler Johnston, chairman of the RCWCC, C. Hobson Goddin, the committee's vice-chair, Robert W. Waitt, Jr., committee secretary, the Honorable Robert C. Throckmorton, member of Richmond City Council, and Dr. William H. Stauffer. The five—all white men—were joined by

² Hereafter I will refer to the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee as the RCWCC.

two press members, Fletcher Cox, Jr. of the *Richmond News-Leader* and Rush Loving, Jr. of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*.

During the centennial years, the committee's composition changed. Robert Waitt became executive secretary of the committee. A full-time paid position, the executive secretary of the RCWCC was responsible for implementing the will of the committee, as well as for fulfilling the committee's daily functions. Several resignations were tendered, including those of William Stauffer, Fletcher Cox, and Rush Loving. New members, such as Miss India W. Thomas and Mr. Saul Viener were appointed as replacements. Thomas, a Richmond fixture, grew up in and around the Confederate Museum (now the Museum of the Confederacy,) almost since the organization's inception. At the time of her appointment, she was a regent of the Confederate Museum. Yet, amidst this turnover on the committee, one thing remained constant. J. Ambler Johnston always anchored the committee as its chairman from the group's inception until its disbandment in 1965.

By profession, Johnston was an engineer and co-owner of the Richmond business, Carneal and Johnston, a well-known local architectural firm. Though an amateur historian, he was consciously aware of the significance of Richmond's centennial efforts to Richmond's residents, as well as for the future. Speaking in 1960 to a gathering of civic groups, Johnston stated, "At its inception, this committee adopted as its premise the preservation of the history of Richmond during the tragic years of 1861-1865 and the commemoration of that era. We early decided to refrain from celebrations, re-enactments, exaltation and commercialization but to concentrate on collecting, portraying the Richmond of 1861-1865, publishing and distributing

maps, brochures, pictures, literature which may be passed on to the future and which, if not done now, would be lost forever.”³ In this, the RCWCC did an admirable job.

Yet, from its inception, the committee was mired in controversy. The RCWCC hoped to establish an expansive history of Civil War Richmond and its place in a larger “reconciliation” narrative. The group was sometimes at odds internally, but always externally. At times, they were outflanked by organizations on both sides of the political spectrum. Their enemies were heritage groups, civic organizations, city officials, state officials, and newspaper editors. Nasty battles unfolded in personal correspondences and in editorial pages. State representatives clashed with the committee over how and where Richmond leaders should commemorate the war. Most damaging was the embarrassing loss of its own executive secretary during the centennial’s height. Despite the group’s public purpose of commemoration, festivities often turned into celebrations. All of these events will be further examined in the following pages.

The following thesis will recount Richmond’s attempt to commemorate the Civil War during the years of 1961 to 1965, specifically focusing on the activities of the RCWCC. It will analyze this commemoration attempt and explore what influence, if any, it has had on shaping Richmond’s collective memory of the Civil War to the present. The first chapter will briefly explore Richmond’s past attempts to commemorate the Civil War during the twentieth century, in order to provide some context for the city’s efforts in 1961. Also, the chapter will explain how the RCWCC was created and for what purpose. Lastly, it will provide some background on the committee’s members, as well as any people who had a major impact on Richmond’s commemoration efforts.

³ *Address of J. Ambler Johnston to the RCWCC Advisory Board*, November 6, 1960, box 5, folder 5, Richmond (Va.) Civil War Centennial Committee records, circa 1956-1965. Local government records collection, Richmond Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia 23219.

Chapter two will examine the RCWCC's plans for the centennial by exploring the different activities and events the committee sponsored including brochures, maps, lectures, pageants, and programs. Using the committee's collections, the chapter will look at the various attempts the committee made to gain involvement from the community, be it with individuals, civic clubs, or heritage groups. Also of interest is the level of participation from the city's various historical institutions and what efforts they undertook to commemorate the Civil War during the centennial.

In addition, the second chapter will focus on the many conflicts the RCWCC addressed in its four years of existence. From the time the committee appointed Robert Waitt as its executive secretary, it clashed with camps of the Sons of Confederate Veterans and groups of the United Daughters of the Confederacy over who should be able to give Richmond's coveted version of the Civil War story. Some of Waitt's ancestors had fought for the Union, which immediately disqualified him from this position and undermined the credibility of the RCWCC for many.⁴

While heritage groups maintained a stringent litmus test with which they could use on anyone who might speak with some authority on Richmond's role in the Civil War, it was a foregone conclusion that this test only apply to the city's white establishment. The RCWCC and various civic groups paid scant attention to considering the perspective of the city's black community. Participation from African-Americans appears to be negligible at best. The RCWCC's relationship with its state counterpart was tenuous, as the two groups argued over how and where the Civil War should be commemorated. *Richmond News-Leader* editor James J. Kilpatrick was a constant critic of the RCWCC and its efforts, leaving the committee's members to spend considerable time refuting his frequent accusations and criticisms.

⁴ "The Civil War Centennial," *Richmond News-Leader*, 8 September 1960.

The third and final chapter will analyze the committee's lasting role in shaping Richmond's collective memory of the war. While the RCWCC planned to use the centennial as an occasion to highlight the noble character of both the North and South, by the end of the commemoration efforts, Richmond residents had turned the events into a time to celebrate the city's Confederate history. Lastly, this chapter will examine Richmond's present-day attempt to commemorate the sesquicentennial of the Civil War, and determine what impact the RCWCC has had on Richmond's current commemoration. To better understand these present activities, people should first know to what Richmond's sesquicentennial committees are responding. There is a perception that the city must now correct its botched centennial commemoration during the sesquicentennial years. A study of just what, if anything, was botched is much needed.

The power of memory, particularly regarding the Civil War, was not lost on members of the RCWCC, particularly J. Ambler Johnston. After all, the American Civil War and Richmond's role in it is the city's grand narrative. Johnston planned, organized, and executed events with the acute understanding that the committee was actively creating a narrative of the Civil War that would shape the collective memory of Richmond for another generation. Well documented within the committee's files are letters and notes from Johnston concerning the final repository of the committee's documents. Johnston's goal of establishing an archive for the committee's papers never materialized and the collection bounced between local museums before stopping at the Library of Virginia.

The RCWCC collection includes a sizable amount of personal and professional correspondences, meeting minutes, brochures, and programs produced by the committee during its four year span. This collection, held locally, will provide the basis of information for this

project. Other sources include copies of the *Richmond News-Leader* and *Richmond Times-Dispatch*. There are many articles covering events organized by the RCWCC, as well as others orchestrated by civic groups or state committees. Centennial events were highlighted frequently by Richmond's editors, particularly James Jackson Kilpatrick. Often times, these editorials provide a public perspective on an issue that is also addressed personally within the committee's private correspondences. As an example, the RCWCC proposed an ordinance, ratified by City Council, that all Civil War tour guides be licensed by the city. Kilpatrick made political hay of the issue on First Amendment grounds in the *News-Leader* and the RCWCC collection reveals several terse letters between Kilpatrick and Robert Waitt, the committee's executive secretary, on the issue.

For many decades, Richmond succeeded in advancing a unified narrative of its Confederate heritage. Though many fail to realize it, this narrative began to change during Richmond's centennial years. A better understanding of Richmond's formal attempt at centennial commemoration fills a noticeable gap between the city's well-known Confederate celebrations of the early twentieth century and the present-day efforts to commemorate the war and emancipation during the sesquicentennial. With a thorough study of Richmond's centennial commemoration, we can better understand efforts to commemorate Richmond's role in the Civil War at the sesquicentennial. There is no better time to examine Richmond's centennial commemoration efforts.

Chapter One: Establishing a Modern Day Commemoration

On the afternoon of November 7, 1960, city councilmen joined Richmond businessmen, as well as members of the newly appointed Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee, to discuss their city's plans for the approaching centennial anniversary of the American Civil War. Members predicted that the coming four-year period of 1961 to 1965 would serve as a windfall for tourism and as a pivotal time during which the city could renew interest in its Civil War and Confederate history.

After Claude Woodward, Richmond's mayor, called the meeting to order, Reverend Richard J. Burke, of the Diocese of Richmond Parochial Schools, rose to read a poem, "The Conquered Banner," by Father Abram Joseph Ryan, originally published shortly after the Civil War's end in 1865. Throughout his poem, Ryan wrote of the purity of the late southern cause and its grasp on the hearts and memories of its supporters. Yet, ultimately, the author concluded that the Confederate cause was no more and that its supporters should remember it for what it was, rather than continue to hold out hope for its revival. Perhaps in selecting the poem, Reverend Burke intended to focus on Ryan's final stanza:

Furl that banner, softly, slowly!
Treat it gently—it is holy—
For it droops above the dead.
Touch it not—unfold it never,
Let it droop there, furled forever,
For its people's hopes are dead!

Father Ryan's admonition to furl the Confederate banner encapsulated the thoughts and motives of Richmond's Civil War centennial organizers as they began to establish a mission and plan the events of the coming four years. Richmond was unable, even unwilling, to heed the advice of "The Conquered Banner" in the years, and even decades, following the fall of the Confederacy. With every passing year, the Confederate mystique grew. Richmond hosted Confederate reunions. Richmonders built grand monuments to the South's leaders. They tended the graves of common soldiers. In every parade, there was still a faint tinge of 'what if' in the air. *What if things had gone the other way? What if we wanted to do it again?*

Father Ryan's command was not obeyed. The banner remained unfurled to varying degrees over the following century. As Reverend Burke read Ryan's century-old words, Richmond, former capital of the Confederacy, faced its best opportunity to turn the poet's wishes into reality. The Civil War centennial offered the city with its best occasion to host a real commemoration, to put sectional animosity aside, and focus on the positive contributions of both North and South. This was Richmond's first serious attempt at sharing a "reconciliation" narrative with the city.

Yet, even after one hundred years, the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee would discover that such efforts divided the city. As the centennial's four years approached, two groups coalesced, each emerging with its own idea of what the centennial should embody. The first group, the authors of Richmond's prior commemorations, might be called the Confederate purists. They were the descendants of the men and women whose lives were uprooted by war, whose fortunes were decimated by a great northern invasion. They were the heritage groups, such as the Sons of Confederate Veterans and United Daughters of the Confederacy. Together, these two organizations had formed the nucleus of Richmond's commemoration efforts. They

felt an obligation to tell the story of Confederate Richmond in the manner in which their predecessors shared it with them. Theirs was a story of heroes and villains, noble defenders and merciless invaders. These members wished to celebrate their beloved ancestors, to pass down their stories, and propagate their virtues.

Yet another group formed as the centennial neared. Mostly of Confederate lineage, these individuals nonetheless shared a common interest in the Civil War as a whole. Many of them were long-time members of various Civil War Roundtables. Civil War Roundtables were groups of predominately amateur historians and Civil War enthusiasts, all of whom gathered together on a regular basis to discuss certain topics and aspects of the Civil War. Unlike the Confederate purists, this group hoped to use the Civil War centennial as an opportunity to shift the focus from one of celebration to one of commemoration. They hoped to adopt not a Confederate narrative of Richmond, but a Civil War narrative of the city, broadening the interpretation to include the considerations and actions of the Union as well as the Confederacy. They sought to commemorate the bravery of soldiers, both southern and northern, to extol their heroism and willingness to fight to uphold their noble beliefs. While this group still praised the South and Richmond's role in the Confederacy, it found room to highlight the sacrifice of the Union as well, noting that the Civil War was ultimately an American war, fought by brothers.

This chapter will focus on the creation of the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee, examining its founding members, and exploring the committee's stated mission and goals. Also, this chapter will briefly consider Richmond's previous attempts to commemorate the Civil War and the Confederacy, noting how the city's efforts changed over time. After focusing specifically on Richmond's efforts to commemorate the centennial, the chapter will consider national efforts to commemorate the Civil War by the United States government.

As the *News-Leader's* Kilpatrick noted in his 1959 editorial, Richmond had a great stake in the approaching centennial of the Civil War. The Confederacy's former capital had a unique opportunity to share its past with a new generation. Ultimately, the city's actions and its Civil War narrative would either reinforce established conceptions of the Civil War, the Confederacy, and Richmond's nexus with both, or it could change the way future generations of Richmond residents and Virginians viewed the war and their past.

Richmond's then-mayor, the Honorable Scott Anderson, would not miss the opportunity to seize the moment. Anderson selected J. Ambler Johnston as the chairman of the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee. Johnston, an engineer by trade and co-owner of the architectural firm Carneal and Johnston, was a life-long Richmonder and amateur historian. The mayor appointed attorney C. Hobson Goddin as the committee's vice-chairman, Robert W. Waitt Jr. as the secretary of the committee, Robert C. Throckmorton as the city council liaison to the centennial committee, and Dr. William H. Stauffer as a committee member. In addition to the committee's five permanent members, Anderson appointed two press officers: Fletcher Cox Jr. of the *Richmond News-Leader* and Rush Loving, Jr. of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*.

Born in Rockbridge County, Virginia, in 1885, J. Ambler Johnston was the son of a Confederate veteran. He co-founded the successful architectural firm of Carneal and Johnston. Carneal and Johnston left its mark on many of Richmond's neighborhoods, as well as some of Virginia's college campuses, including Johnston's alma mater, Virginia Tech. An amateur historian and long-time member of the Richmond Civil War Roundtable, Johnston dedicated much of his time to studying the Civil War. He cut his teeth on Civil War history driving

Douglas Southall Freeman, the esteemed biographer of Robert E. Lee, from battlefield to battlefield around Richmond.

The vice-chairman, C. Hobson Goddin, was the youngest member of the newly-formed committee at thirty-five years old. A lawyer in private practice, Goddin was a student of the Civil War since he was a child. Living in Richmond's Fan District, he recalled listening to stories of the war from his grandmother, who lived in Richmond during the city's fall.⁵ Goddin was serving at the time as vice-president of the Richmond Civil War Roundtable.⁶

By far the most polarizing figure of the RCWCC was Robert W. Waitt, Jr. A fifth-generation Richmonder, Waitt's two grandfathers served the Union during the Civil War; one as a soldier, the other as a Union spy in Richmond. In post-World War II Richmond, Waitt was an anomaly. Not only did Waitt descend from a tarnished lineage, he was also a staunch—some might say obnoxious—Republican in Democratic Virginia. He ran unsuccessfully for the office of lieutenant governor in 1952 and served in various capacities on local, state, and national Republican committees.⁷

Despite these faults, Robert W. Waitt, Jr. had two assets. First, he had a passion for the Civil War and an encyclopedic memory of its events. He was a past president of the Richmond Civil War Roundtable—a position of note in 1950's Richmond—a genealogist, and historical advisor. He served as Richmond's city historian from 1959 to 1965.⁸ Second, and more

⁵ C. Hobson Goddin, interview by author, March 12, 2012, Richmond, digital recording.

⁶ "J. Ambler Johnston Heads Centennial Unit," *Richmond News-Leader*, 16 April 1959.

⁷ Goddin interview.

⁸ "Robert W. Waitt Jr., 78, dies," *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 19 October 1998.

importantly, he had a well-connected father. Waitt's father was a member of the Richmond Rotary Club, along with other members of the city's government and centennial committee, including Claude Woodward and Ambler Johnston. Robert W. Waitt, Sr., and his connections would benefit his son prior to, during, and after the Civil War centennial.

Known as "the dissenter," Robert C. Throckmorton served as Richmond City Council's liaison to the RCWCC. A pugnacious individual familiar with controversy, Throckmorton's political career spanned three decades. First elected in 1939, he served almost continuously on Richmond City Council until 1966 when he lost his final bid for local office. By profession, Throckmorton was a certified public accountant. For most of his career, however, he was co-owner of the Throckmorton and Booth wallpaper store, located on West Broad Street.⁹

A 62-year-old economist, Dr. William H. Stauffer was the fifth member of the RCWCC. He was a past president and vice-president of the Richmond Civil War Roundtable. An amateur historian with a passion for Civil War history, as a youth Stauffer bicycled from his home in Maryland to Gettysburg to witness the fiftieth anniversary of the fighting at Gettysburg.¹⁰ In addition to the five members of the committee, Anderson appointed two ex-officio members as well. Fletcher Cox, Jr. was a general assignment reporter with the *Richmond News-Leader*, and Rush Loving, copy reader and reporter for the *Richmond Times Dispatch*. Cox and Fletcher were tasked with the responsibility of generating press for the RCWCC and building strong relationships with the media for the committee.

⁹ "Robert Throckmorton dies; spoke out as councilman," *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 8 July 1989.

¹⁰ "J. Ambler Johnston Heads Centennial Unit," *Richmond News-Leader*, 16 April 1959.

Businessman Claude Woodward was appointed to Richmond City Council in 1957 to fill the recently vacated council seat of Harold H. Dervishian. He did not create the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee, but became mayor shortly after the committee's inception and presided during its most productive years. Woodward had just retired as vice president of Charles G. Jurgens Furniture Company in Richmond when he entered the local political scene. His time on Richmond City Council roughly paralleled the efforts of the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee. Woodward was elected mayor by city councilmen in 1960 and served in that capacity until 1962. He retired from city politics in 1964. During his time on council, Woodward was often criticized for his advocacy of federal funding of Richmond building projects and for his support of the then-controversial issue of adopting daylight-savings time. However, even his critics acknowledged his tough work ethic. In a 1963 editorial, the *Richmond Times Dispatch* noted, "It is doubtful the city of Richmond ever got more work out of anybody for \$100 a month than it has gotten out of Claude Woodward."¹¹

A month after its establishment, the RCWCC went to work determining its purpose and considering the programs and events that would define the committee and its city's efforts to commemorate the Civil War centennial. Having no meeting space to call its own, the group originally convened for meetings in the offices of the Carneal and Johnston Building, which existed in the area of Belvidere and Cary Street.

There the committee outlined a rough plan of action. These seven men stuck to an agenda that focused primarily on highlighting leaders, monuments, and military actions. The committee produced a core group of programs and publications of high quality. Additionally, it

¹¹ "Claude W. Woodward, former mayor, dies at 99," *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 27 January 1997.

would be the source of information for various local committees throughout Virginia and, if requested, the nation. The RCWCC worked in conjunction with other organizations, particularly Virginia's Civil War Centennial Committee, to produce programs and publications that complemented the work of the other organizations. Also, the committee sought to be the primary source of information to the public during those four years.

Specifically, the group hammered out a bullet-point list of approximately ten items to accomplish during the centennial period. This list included the publication of maps produced by Richmond's Department of Public Works, outlining the city as it was in 1861; the rebuilding of fortifications located on the grounds of Byrd Airport; various ceremonies at established monuments throughout Richmond, as well as possible ceremonies at any new monuments created in the city during the centennial years; regular newspaper columns from Richmond during the Civil War in Richmond's present-day newspapers; walking tours of the city with the assistance of pamphlets and modern signage to direct visitors; the construction of a monument on the former site of Libby Prison; and the erection of a visitors center, preferably at Chimborazo Park, to serve as a central starting point for tourists to learn about Richmond's Civil War attractions.

Also, the committee recognized a need to create an advisory board to assist in the implementation of its plans. Area organizations—civic, historical, business—with an interest in promoting the city's Civil War history would, it hoped, participate. Ideally, this committee would make recommendations of how best to market Richmond's Civil War and bring in tourist revenue for the city. Individuals on this board would have the connections and relationships throughout the city to turn many of the RCWCC's proposals into realities.

As the committee laid out its four-year agenda, members quickly realized the need for a full-time employee who would be responsible for implementing the ideas and programs of the RCWCC. While the committee could recommend programs, it needed someone to see those proposals through to fruition. Most members did not have the time or energy to make these things happen.

At a committee meeting on June 3, 1960, committee members created a sub-committee whose sole purpose was to hire an individual to fill the position of executive secretary of the RCWCC. The group selected Hobson Goddin, William Stauffer, and Robert Throckmorton to steer the sub-committee. Also, the group quickly established a description for the position. The Executive Secretary of the RCWCC would assist the committee in the planning and execution of all commemorative events and activities approved by the committee.¹² The men selected June 20 as a deadline for selecting a person to fill the position and quickly submitted the advertisement to Richmond's newspapers.

The responses came quickly. All told, Goddin's committee received fourteen applications for the executive secretary position. Not only do the applications reveal the backgrounds, strengths, and weaknesses of the applicants, they provide a glimpse of what the applicants believed a Civil War centennial committee would be looking for, especially one located in the former capital of the Confederacy.

¹² Marguerite T. Bowdou, *Application for the Position of Executive Director*, box 3, folder 11, Richmond (Va.) Civil War Centennial Committee records, circa 1956-1965. Local government records collection, Richmond Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia 23219 [hereafter cited as the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee records].

The application pool ran the entire spectrum from homemakers to career members of the National Park Service. The committee specifically requested in its application that applicants should demonstrate “a clear understanding of the principal events of the Civil War and evidence of something more than a purely academic study of the subject.” Yet, for many applicants—indeed most—blood lines, lineage, and connection to the Confederacy were the primary highlights on an application. In stating her Confederate bona fides, one applicant, Marguerite T. Bowdou, averred, “I’ve always had a more than perfunctory interest in the Civil War, as I am a member of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. I belong to the Lee Chapter and our motto is loyalty to the truth of Confederate history. I’m a direct descendant of Robert E. Lee. Lexington, Virginia, is my home town.”¹³

Emphasizing her Confederate roots, Bowdou believed that, as had past commemorations, the Civil War centennial would continue emphasizing the Confederate narrative. However, Richmond’s committee looked to this position to provide leadership in its effort to pivot to their “reconciliation” narrative, making the coming four years a Civil War commemoration, rather than a Confederate one.

While the application of Marguerite Bowdou might be an extreme example of what the RCWCC did not want in its sole employee, there were other applicants that appeared amply qualified for the position. Floyd Taylor was originally a Richmonder who embarked on a career in the National Park Service. In a letter to Hobson Goddin, Taylor wrote, “Earlier tonight I talked with our mutual friend Mr. J. Ambler Johnston, by telephone, in connection with the *Richmond News-Leader* publicity item on the subject of Executive Director of the Civil War

¹³ Ibid.

Centennial Committee. Mr. Johnston suggested I write you immediately for an application form, and that he would endeavor to contact you immediately by telephone to relay my expressions of interest and to ask you to send me a blank form.”¹⁴

Taylor was formerly superintendent of Richmond National Battlefield Park, as well as Petersburg National Battlefield Park. Based upon the description and criteria set forth by the RCWCC, Taylor appeared well-qualified, perhaps over-qualified, for the executive secretary position. In a letter, dated July 21, 1960, Goddin writes, “At a meeting of our City Centennial Committee on yesterday, we reviewed a number of applications for the position of Executive Director. We have screened the applicants down to four, among which is your application. Of course, the Committee is very much impressed with your qualifications and Mr. Johnston spoke very highly of his association with you.”¹⁵

Yet, Taylor’s application proceeded no further. In a letter written to Goddin on June 15, 1960, and carbon copied to Stauffer, Throckmorton, and Johnston, Robert Waitt, then secretary of the RCWCC, announced his interest in the committee’s new paid position.¹⁶ With the support of Waitt’s father and the influence of the Richmond Rotary, Waitt persuaded his fellow committee members to award him the position. Though his keen interest in the Civil War would be an asset, Waitt’s propensity to antagonize those with which he disagreed would be a reoccurring liability throughout the centennial.

¹⁴ Floyd B. Taylor, *Application for the Position of Executive Director*, box 3, folder 11, Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee records.

¹⁵ C. Hobson Goddin to Floyd B. Taylor, July 21, 1960, box 3, folder 11, Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee records.

¹⁶ Robert W. Waitt, Jr. to C. Hobson Goddin, June 15, 1960, box 3, folder 11, Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee records.

In a sense, Richmond's effort during the centennial years was new. For the first time, an entity other than heritage groups, such as the UCV, SCV, or UDC, would coordinate the city's commemoration efforts. By creating the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee, the city ensured that it would lead Civil War events in the area, in effect negating those who were directly impacted by the war from the decision-making process. Contemporary historians and event organizers might scoff at the notion, but Richmond's Civil War centennial was novel. It was the city's first real attempt to commemorate the war in its entirety, rather than merely celebrating a particular participating group of it.

As early as 1866, Richmond began to commemorate its Confederate heritage, primarily by lamenting the loss of those who died fighting for the Confederacy. Some time during the month of May, Richmond's women, mostly members of ladies associations, gathered in the city's cemeteries to tend to the graves and grounds containing buried Confederates. Generally, the women held three commemorations: the first at Oakwood Cemetery, the second at Hebrew Cemetery, and the third ceremony at Hollywood Cemetery.¹⁷

During the first decade of observances, Confederate Memorial Day as it came to be known, was a time of mourning and reflection. There were no thunderous sermons or stem-winding speeches regarding the glorious Confederacy, as people today might suspect. Rather, the events were known for their solemnity and austerity. There was a Spartan-like simplicity and an air of bereavement to the proceedings.¹⁸ However, during the mid-1870's, Confederate Memorial Day began to change. Reconstruction ended. With Federal forces removed,

¹⁷ Martha E. Kinney, "If Vanquished I am Still Victorious': Religious and Cultural Symbolism in Virginia's Confederate Memorial Day Celebrations," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 106, no. 3 (1998), 239

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 247.

commemorating the Confederacy became more open. Speakers had greater flexibility and freedom regarding the content of their speeches and sermons. The omnipresent eye of the federal government no longer observed. Historian Martha Kinney wrote, “After the re-interment of the Confederate dead from Gettysburg in 1873, Richmond organizations adopted a more elaborate ritual that may have signified that the bitterness of grief had subsided. Consolation was no longer necessary; what southerners needed instead was commemoration. And commemoration is a public, social act, rather than an individual one.”¹⁹ Participants disseminated from the confines of closed cemeteries—places of mourning—and moved to public squares. Events became more inclusive. Ladies associations were joined by Confederate heritage groups, religious groups, and civic organizations.

The inclusion of so many different groups, each with separate purposes, was caused by two things: the end of Reconstruction and the growing economic boom in Virginia and throughout the South. Two competing groups developed, each in opposition to the other, each in a way battling for control of Confederate Memorial Day. Civic organizations and booster clubs, eager to promote industrialism and the rise of the New South, saw Confederate Memorial Day as an opportunity to shape Richmond’s collective memory, with the hope of leading Richmond into a new century of progress. Heritage groups, such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the United Confederate Veterans, and the Sons of Confederate Veterans, accompanied the ladies associations. These groups saw Confederate Memorial Day as an opportunity to justify and defend the actions of Confederate ancestors. Kinney wrote, “By the early twentieth century,

¹⁹ Ibid.

however, veterans' organizations and Confederate memorial associations had taken control of the day and its symbolic meaning."²⁰

Writing of Confederate commemorations, Virginius Dabney stated, "The South's annual Memorial Day in the late nineteenth century attracted large numbers of participants, with at least one prominent speaker on each program. But as years passed, and the first decade of the new century was reached, interest in the day began to wane. The observance was not abandoned, but participation and interest were less marked."²¹ Slowly, as is usually the case in Richmond, the city shifted from merely decorating and maintaining the three cemeteries named above to erecting monuments to the heroes of the Confederacy. In 1890, decades of scheming and debating ended when supporters erected a statue to Lee on a plot of land in the city's western end. Part commemoration attempt and part real estate ploy, the erection of the Lee statue and the creation of Monument Avenue provided a grand public space where heritage groups could galvanize Richmond residents, and the South for that matter, in an effort to celebrate their past, while firmly establishing a public memory that would shape the opinions of Richmond residents well into the future.²²

In 1907, supporters dedicated two more monuments on the grand avenue, one to J.E.B. Stuart and the other to Jefferson Davis. Authors Kathy Edwards and Esme Howard wrote, "Each new monument became a cult object on this pilgrimage road emanating from the former

²⁰ Ibid., 248.

²¹ Virginius Dabney, *The Last Review: The Confederate Reunion, Richmond, 1932* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1984), 29.

²² Kathy Edwards and Esme Howard, "Monument Avenue: The Architecture of Consensus in the New South, 1890-1930," *Perspectives in Vernacular Forum* 6 (1997): 95.

Confederate capital and ‘Holy of Holies,’ and the number of pilgrims was sometimes staggering. By southern lights, Monument Avenue had become redeemed and sacred ground.”²³ Wrote Dabney of the Stuart and Davis unveilings, “In 1907, when the J.E.B. Stuart and Jefferson Davis monuments were dedicated on Richmond’s Monument Avenue within a few days of each other, the biggest of all the Confederate reunions took place. The program lasted for an entire week. Eighteen thousand veterans came in thirty-one trains from all corners of the South.”²⁴

The final two Confederate statues were added over a twenty year span. In 1919, the Stonewall Jackson statue was unveiled at Monument Avenue and the Boulevard. In 1929, Matthew Fontaine Maury became the last of an elite Confederate club. Combined, the monuments provided a focal point around which the wealthiest of the New South could build their homes. Perhaps, more importantly, it provided Confederate faithful with an area of their own. The heritage groups and ladies associations had a world-class parade ground to which they could draw both the devoted and curious bystander alike.

With the Maury statue in place and the public landscape of Monument Avenue established, Confederate supporters began to consider the health and vitality of their veterans. Dabney wrote, “The white-haired veterans in their faded gray coats were to be seen here and there in all eleven states, and they were honored wherever they went. By the early 1920’s most of the old men who had once worn the gray had passed on, and it seemed clear that the last real

²³ Ibid., 99.

²⁴ Dabney, *The Last Review*, 9.

reunion would have to be held soon. Richmond, which had been the objective of the Northern armies for four years, was the logical place for it.”²⁵

Richmond held its final reunion of Confederate veterans in 1932. Beginning on June 20 and lasting through June 25, the week-long celebration (and a celebration it was) featured the United Confederate Veterans convention, rousing political speeches, and dances. Though the crowds waned compared to prior reunions, those who witnessed it felt that they were a part of something special, something historic.²⁶ The veterans passed through the city streets, ferried by cars, unable to walk. Though stooped in stature, these veterans had grown greater in the eyes of those watching. They were giants in the minds of men and their story represented a new strand woven into the fabric of American folklore. Writing of this moment in the *Richmond News-Leader*, Douglas Southall Freeman wrote, “A grateful city gladly threw its portals wide each time the aged survivors of Homeric strife returned to view the scenes of youth. Today the city has its last review. The armies of the South will march our streets no more. It is the rear guard, engaged with death that passes now. Who that remembers other days can face that truth and still withhold his tears.”²⁷

As Richmond began to plan for the Civil War centennial, this was the sentiment of much of the city. The words “Civil War memories” invoked images of a burning city, gray-bearded veterans gathered at the Old Soldiers home, and grand statues to Confederate heroes lining the streets of Richmond’s most elite blocks. In short, they were Confederate memories. Prior to the

²⁵ Ibid., 29.

²⁶ Ibid., 45.

²⁷ Douglas Southall Freeman, “The Last Parade,” *Richmond News-Leader* (1932); quoted in Virginius L. Dabney, *The Last Review: The Confederate Reunion, Richmond, 1932* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1984), 157.

Civil War centennial, Richmond had remembered the Confederacy. It had vigorously drafted and rehearsed a Confederate narrative that managed to find victories in a humbling defeat. Richmond had not commemorated the war as the RCWCC planned to do. It had never officially considered it. Now, for the first time, it would attempt to remember the Civil War, instead of exclusively celebrating the South.

Richmond's city council was not the only government planning to commemorate the war's centennial. Localities across the nation, states (including Virginia), and the national government were planning to do so as well. Beginning in 1956, the United States government constructed its own plan to commemorate the Civil War. President Dwight Eisenhower appointed a non-partisan committee to plan the centennial's events. Eisenhower selected a contingent of businessmen, media executives, and Civil War scholars whose job it was to package a Civil War commemoration to the American public.

Like Richmond's group, the United States Civil War Centennial Committee (USCWCC) sought to create a Civil War commemoration of the courage of both Union and Confederate soldiers. However, their motive differed. The USCWCC hoped to promote a united nation, proud of its past, ready to stand resolute against its Cold War foes.²⁸ In his book, *Troubled Commemoration: The American Civil War Centennial, 1961-1965*, historian Robert J. Cook asserts that two groups initially wrestled for control of the U.S. Civil War Centennial Committee: politicians and businessmen versus professional historians. The first group "envisioned a flag-waving national pageant that would celebrate the war, reconciliation, and nationalism." The

²⁸ Robert J. Cook, "Historians' Forum: The American Civil War's Centennial vs. the Sesquicentennial," *Civil War History* LVII (2011): 388.

historians “called for a more sober Centennial that would depict the harsh reality of the war through good books and articles, public lectures, the archival collection and preservation of period documents, and the creation of useful bibliographies.”²⁹ These factions vied for supremacy throughout the centennial, often creating embarrassing scenes that unfolded before the public and national press.

According to Cook, what was certain was that the group, as initially led, was primarily concerned with demonstrating national unity so that the country might be well-equipped in its ongoing struggle against communism.³⁰ To achieve this goal, the committee adopted a nationalist narrative of the Civil War. Cook wrote that “the late conflict had been a tragic brothers’ war brought on by the South’s determination to defend the rights of the states against perceived encroachment by the North. Both sides had fought courageously in the war, but in the end the North’s superior economic and manpower resources had carried the day. While the killing was unfortunate, the Union victory had been a blessing because it had laid the foundations of future American greatness.”³¹ Largely absent from this narrative was slavery and its place in the conflict between the two sides.

For its chairman, the national committee selected Major General Ulysses S. Grant III, the eighty-year old grandson of the famous Union general. In many ways, the committee’s selection of Grant as chairman had advantages and disadvantages. Grant, a Cold War stalwart, provided the centennial with a living link to the Civil War. Because of his lineage, when he spoke he gave

²⁹ Ibid., 394.

³⁰ Robert J. Cook, *Troubled Commemoration: The American Civil War Centennial, 1961-1965* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 40.

³¹ Ibid., 5

the committee a perceived authority and credibility. Also, Grant endorsed the committee's "reconciliation" narrative whole-heartedly, arguing the war was an event that ultimately united Americans, making the post-war United States a stronger nation.³²

However, Grant was a liability, too. In various public positions, Grant had advocated the strengthening of segregation and Jim Crow laws. Also, he was prone to making anti-Semitic comments.³³ Known as a fervent patriot and frequent critic of the threat of communism, Grant was unable, or unwilling, to separate the Civil War centennial from the Cold War struggle against totalitarianism. Writing in support of the USCWCC's efforts, Grant stated, "What better lesson in patriotism and self-sacrifice for a cause can be given to our children of today and future generations than to teach them what Americans did in those days of crisis and greatness? We today cannot do better than to emulate the patriotism and ready self-sacrifice of the men and women who fought that war."³⁴ Ultimately, Grant's views on race and his Cold War obsession hindered the USCWCC, rendering it unable to adapt to the rapid societal changes, such as the growing involvement of African Americans in places of political leadership.

Like the USCWCC, the RCWCC was attempting to commemorate the Civil War by considering the perspectives of both North and South. Though many involved with the planning of Richmond's sesquicentennial would disagree, in this sense, Richmond's centennial committee was being inclusive. For the first time in a century, the city's commemoration focused on the war as a whole, considering the actions of both sides. For the capital of the Confederacy, the

³² Ibid., 1.

³³ Ibid., 33.

³⁴ Ibid.

home of Monument Avenue, and so many vivid memories, this approach was novel. However, it was still limited. As the committee stated, their mission focused on military and political history. They explored great men and battles, leaving common soldiers, the activities of women, and the role of African Americans largely untouched.

Like the USCWCC, the Richmond group adopted the same ‘reconciliation’ narrative of the Civil War. As the RCWCC noted, the Civil War centennial was a time to memorialize the heroism and bravery of men who fought for both the Union and the Confederacy, both fighting for their own noble beliefs. As time passed, the conflict made the country stronger, uniting participants and factions with a shared common bond. Though sectional animosity had declined considerably in Richmond by 1932, such comments would have been unthinkable then.

As the centennial of the Civil War approached, Richmond and its committee began planning the centennial events in a novel way. The committee cast a broad narrative, removing the Union from the villains’ column and placing it beside that of the Confederacy in the column of heroes. According to the new narrative, there were no villains, only heroes all around, each fighting for their own noble reasons. The committee was so amicable as to select a man of Northern distinction to carry out the daily task of the committee. Not only did Robert Waitt’s ancestors fight for the Union, Waitt himself was a Republican, who ran for the office of lieutenant governor on a platform of desegregation, legalization of abortion, and the abolition of the poll tax.³⁵ Such a background was anathema to the city’s strident pro-Confederate Democrats. Yet, in a city criticized for its opposition to change, much had changed. The

³⁵ Robert W. Waitt, Jr., interview by John M. Coski and Tucker H. Hill, 8 February 1994, The Museum of the Confederacy.

centennial committee's chairman, a disciple of Douglas Southall Freeman, was now working hand in hand with the descendant of a Union spy to bring Civil War history to the capital of the Confederacy.

Richmond's memorials were once firmly in the hands of ladies associations and heritage groups. However, heritage groups had declined, and with the last Confederate gone, the mantle of commemoration was grasped by the city's government. The product was a committee of predominately amateur historians advancing a broader narrative of the war and its meaning for the time. Richmond's commemorations had come a long way from the days of mourning in the city's cemeteries, and even from the Confederate veterans parades down Monument Avenue. Though some of that remained, there was definitely an attempt to commemorate the conflict and its participants in general, rather than elevate the personalities of a few specifically.

The Civil War centennial was another first for the city as well. Armed with an annual budget of \$20,000 (roughly one-fifth of the entire USCWCC's budget), Richmond's committee was tasked with boosting tourism and commerce for Richmond as well.³⁶ The committee also had the support of an advisory board, a coalition of approximately twenty-five businesses, civic clubs, and historical institutions to assist it in this task. The result was a smattering of booster events including sponsorship of minor league baseball games, a Civil War centennial beauty pageant, and a fight over the construction and location of a Civil War visitors' center for tourists. While all were minor events in the history of Richmond's Civil War centennial, they are reflective of the committee's broad mission for the centennial.

³⁶ Ibid.

If the centennial committee and Richmond's government thought they could introduce such stark changes into Richmond's Civil War narrative without raising the ire of her citizens, then they were sadly mistaken. As I will explore in future chapters, both the Richmond committee and the USCWCC encountered fierce hostility towards their actions. However, while the USCWCC got entangled in the civil rights movement and criticism from progressive elements, Richmond's committee was broadsided by the right in the form of heritage groups, such as the Sons of Confederate Veterans and the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and from the conservative elements in the press, like the *Richmond News-Leader*.

Despite the criticism of today's historians, who largely view Richmond's Civil War Centennial Committee as an abject failure, I will argue that the RCWCC successfully separated Richmond from its celebratory past of Confederate-led celebrations, giving the city its first real Civil War commemoration. Though the committee's broadened Civil War narrative of reconciliation was a positive, it had severe limitations, namely regarding racial inclusion. While the RCWCC did reach out to members of the black community, according to the committee's vice-chairman C. Hobson Goddin, it is unknown whether this effort was sincere or a mere nicety one makes to cover oneself. Perhaps, as the centennial unfolded alongside the civil rights movement, the Civil War was still too fresh in the minds of both blacks and whites to have a racially inclusive commemoration.³⁷

As the centennial began, just how Richmond would react to the RCWCC remained to be seen. Would the city, once the bulwark of the Confederacy, be willing to 'furl that banner' as Father Ryan suggested in his poem? As the following chapters will demonstrate, there was no

³⁷ Goddin interview.

consensus in Richmond as to how the Civil War should be commemorated. Though a century removed, the war and its memory were many things to different people. A battle would ensue as to just how the war should be remembered.

Chapter Two: Triumphs and Travails

Like the war it sought to memorialize, the Civil War centennial commemoration in Richmond generated animosity and rancor. The RCWCC accomplished some significant goals. The group succeeded in producing numerous documents and maps, and conducted several events and ceremonies, providing ample opportunity for enthusiasts to learn about Richmond's role during the war. Events ranged from solemn ceremonies and academic lectures to entertaining balls, ballets, and beauty pageants. If nothing else, during the course of four years, the RCWCC served the nation—even the world—as a major source of information for inquirers.

Yet, for all its accolades, the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee failed to provide people with anything more than surface-level information regarding Richmond during the Civil War. Stymied by the politics of public commemoration, the RCWCC became mired down in even the simplest task. While the RCWCC made headway in moving Richmond away from a celebration led by heritage groups, it suffered serious setbacks, some self-inflicted and some not, that prevented it from maximizing its potential. This chapter will attempt to reconstruct the actions of the RCWCC, largely charting the committee's shortcomings and successes from the time of its inception until its dissolution.

In its centennial experience, Richmond was not unique. Many government commissions at various levels were hindered by the politics of remembering the Civil War, at the same time that the nation attempted to navigate through the turbulent waters of the civil rights era. Especially at the national level, the politics of integration and civil rights were strategically

injected into commemoration activities, frustrating centennial planners, and creating a national dialogue regarding race relations and the advancement of civil rights legislation.

As Richmond's commemoration began to coalesce, progressing from conceptualization to implementation, the city's national counterpart, the United States Civil War Centennial Commission (USCWCC), witnessed the almost total derailment of its commemoration efforts. The ensuing events reminded Americans that Civil War commemoration was susceptible to present-day political concerns. No commemoration could occur without consideration of the ongoing civil rights movement, as well as the local customs and segregation laws in southern cities.

The USCWCC agreed to hold its fourth national assembly meeting in Charleston, South Carolina. State Civil War centennial commissions sent representatives to the annual meetings. The 1961 national assembly was intended to coincide with the reenactment of the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter. However, the group's annual meeting soon became embroiled in political controversy, as the nation focused its attention on the South's Jim Crow laws and specifically the question of whether Charleston's hotels would accommodate African-American representative Madaline Williams.

A former member of the New Jersey legislature, the sixty-five year old Williams had been appointed to the New Jersey Civil War Centennial Commission. According to historian Robert Cook in his book *Troubled Commemoration*, Williams was likely the unfortunate pawn of civil rights activists looking to force the next major battle in the progression of the civil rights movement. He writes, "There is no evidence that she was either the prime mover in an African-American conspiracy to use the Charleston gathering as a platform to promote civil rights or that she was placed intentionally on the New Jersey commission to create problems for the CWCC.

However, it is clear that some of her white colleagues on the Garden State's agency decided to use her appointment both to demonstrate New Jersey's commitment to civil rights and to expose the racism of the national commission."³⁸

Whatever efforts the USCWCC had exerted toward commemorating the beginning of the war were quickly dashed as members such as Ulysses S. Grant, III, former Virginia governor William M. Tuck, and others found themselves in a bitter confrontation with the New Jersey delegation over the treatment of black delegates, particularly Madaline Williams, in Charleston. The national assembly was scheduled to take place at Charleston's Francis Marion Hotel. As a public hotel subject to Jim Crow laws, it was doubtful that the Francis Marion would, or even could, accommodate Williams.³⁹

New Jersey continued using the USCWCC event as a political maneuver as part of the larger civil rights discussion. Members of the USCWCC, South Carolina's Civil War committee, and the local press responded, vehemently arguing that the USCWCC had no authority over state government regarding local customs. The conflict grew, even expanding nationally, as media outlets such as the *New York Times* weighed in on the stalemate.⁴⁰

With the eyes of the country focused on Charleston, 100 years after the actions at Fort Sumter, President John F. Kennedy felt burdened to intervene. Thinking of his own political future, the newly-elected president sought to broker a compromise that would garner him support among black voters and liberal Democrats, while not totally neglecting the many white southern

³⁸ Robert J. Cook, *Troubled Commemoration: The American Civil War Centennial, 1961-1965* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 90.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 92.

governors to whom he owed his presidency.⁴¹ The Kennedy administration suggested that the national assembly be relocated to a nearby U.S. naval base, a move that would provide for equal treatment of all participants. The USCWCC balked. However, with the support of liberal southern historian Bell Wiley and an unrelenting press, Grant, the USCWCC chairman, reversed course. The fourth national assembly was held at the U.S. naval base in Charleston, and northern states dropped their boycott and attended the event.

Though the assembly took place and all participated, the damage to the United States Civil War commemoration efforts was done. New Jersey succeeded in politicizing the commemoration. The public was reminded of the institutional inequality still prevalent 100 years after the war began. Any attempt of showing a united front during the Cold War was shattered. Furthermore, this episode confirmed the problem of hosting inter-regional reconciliations. The consequence was that inevitably blacks would be left out of the efforts.

Charleston bore intense scrutiny from the American public, the media, and academia for its handling of the United States Civil War Centennial Commission's visit to the city. The city's customs and its strict enforcement of Jim Crow reminded the country of the institutional inequality remaining in large pockets of the United States. Such a reminder shifted the focus of Americans from one of Civil War commemoration to the battle for civil rights.

Yet, one year after the Charleston debacle, Madaline Williams, New Jersey's African-American delegate to the National Civil War Centennial Commission, visited Richmond at the invitation of RCWCC Executive Secretary Robert Waitt. Richmond was planning a Memorial Day ceremony at Byrd airport to unveil a new monument to commemorate war-time advancements in aviation by the North and South. Of her two-day visit to Richmond, Williams

⁴¹ Ibid., 96.

stated, “It gives me great pleasure that a member of my race should be accepted with such grace in a southern city.” Her reception was “proof that the Civil War centennial has taken a turn for the better in the South as well as the North.”⁴² Also, Williams had kind words for Richmond’s mayor, Claude Woodward, as well as Waitt. In addition, the article taken from a Newark, New Jersey, newspaper stated that the city had discreetly been desegregating its hotels, restaurants, and other entertainment venues around town.⁴³ Ever the opportunist, Waitt later noted that he was responsible for inviting Williams and Everett Landers, the New Jersey centennial committee’s executive director, to Richmond, playing a small role in defusing the previous year’s tense situation, improving race relations in the south, and advancing the Civil War centennial.⁴⁴

Though Richmond’s commemoration managed largely to avoid the traps and snares of civil rights politics, it did not escape unscathed. Nationally, progressives and advocates for racial equality led the opposition movements to Civil War commemoration. Criticism came from the political left. However, in Richmond, it was the political right that criticized commemoration activities. Heritage groups and members of the Richmond press, such as the *Richmond News-Leader’s* James J. Kilpatrick, were most vehement in their denigration. Any hope of leading a smooth and uncontested transition from Confederate celebration to a narrative of reunification was shattered almost from the committee’s inception.

⁴² “Richmond Quietly Erases Color Line,” *The Daily Home News*, 1 June 1962.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Robert W. Waitt, Jr., interview by John M. Coski and Tucker H. Hill, 8 February 1994, The Museum of the Confederacy.

As the newly-formed committee set about its work, its volunteer members drafted a budget to submit to Richmond City Council to fund their plans. The annual budget, authored by Waitt and submitted to city council by councilor and committee member Robert Throckmorton, contained funding for items such as research, the printing of publications, stationary, and office supplies.

However, its most significant line items were for salaries for an executive secretary and a typist, to be paid \$5,000 and \$3,500 respectively.⁴⁵ As the RCWCC delved deeper into its work, the group of amateur historians quickly ascertained this necessity for assistance. Faced with the daunting task of planning the coming four years and disseminating information to not only Richmonders, but to Virginians as well, the members devised a plan for this executive secretary position that would be devoted to these very tasks. Rather than an individual assigned to actively lead the committee forward, the committee chose to create a position that would execute its ideas and plans, while carrying out the routine duties of the group.

With funding secured, the committee turned to Richmond's press to advertise for the position. For the executive secretary post, the committee issued a fourteen-point memorandum, outlining the responsibilities of the position. According to the document, "The Committee views the office of its Executive Secretary primarily as one of planning for the observances and other commemorative events incident to the Civil War Centennial and putting these plans into execution under the direction and supervision of the Committee. The routine conduct of the office as an information center constitutes an integral part of the general responsibility."⁴⁶

⁴⁵ *Meeting minutes of the RCWCC*, April 1, 1960, box 1, folder 1, Richmond (Va.) Civil War Centennial Committee records, circa 1956-1965. Local government records collection, Richmond Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia 23219 [hereafter cited as the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee records].

⁴⁶ *Job Description of the Executive Secretary*, box 3, folder 11, Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee records.

As the deadline to submit applications expired, a sub-committee, including Hobson Goddin, William Stauffer, and Robert Throckmorton, sifted through the resumes of twelve applicants, each with varied experience before selecting a familiar candidate, who was actually their peer.⁴⁷ In writing to Waitt of his appointment, Hobson Goddin stated “After reviewing numerous applications and interviewing several of the applicants for the position of Executive Secretary of the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee, the Committee is of the opinion that you are the best qualified person among the applicants for the position.”⁴⁸

In Waitt, the committee hoped it had selected a known entity, an individual vested in the committee’s vision and its plans for the next four years. By all accounts, Waitt was competent, polished, and knowledgeable in the subject matter at hand. Yet, retrospectively, Goddin issued a far different summation about Waitt’s appointment. Waitt’s father, Robert W. Waitt, Sr. owned Robert Waitt, Inc., an advertising agency located on Franklin Street in Richmond. He was well-connected in the city’s business and civic community. According to Goddin, Waitt’s appointment to the position of executive secretary and the creation of the position itself, rested more in Ambler Johnston’s relationship with Robert Waitt, Sr., than it did on Robert Waitt, Jr.’s sterling credentials.⁴⁹ In an interview conducted decades after the centennial, Waitt noted the close relationship between his father and Ambler Johnston, stating, “He[Johnston] and my father were charter members of the Richmond Rotary Club, and they were very very close to each other, and I knew the name Ambler Johnston from the time I knew my father’s name. They were

⁴⁷ “Civil War Post Goes to Waitt,” *Richmond News-Leader*, 15 August 1960.

⁴⁸ C. Hobson Goddin to Robert W. Waitt, Jr., August 11, 1960, box 3, folder 11, Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee records.

⁴⁹ C. Hobson Goddin, interview by author, March 12, 2012, Richmond, digital recording.

very close. Ambler was a walking encyclopedia of the Civil War, and he and Allen Seville and Doug Freeman and my father, and several others were instrumental in getting the Rotary Club to put up the original markers around the battlefield.”⁵⁰

Born in Richmond, Waitt was a product of Richmond public schools, graduating from the city’s John Marshall High School. After his high school graduation, Waitt traveled north, ultimately earning a B.A. from Columbia University, as well as an M.A. from the University of Chicago. Waitt proceeded to work in public relations, chiefly for several world’s fairs in event management and marketing positions. Upon returning to Richmond, Waitt joined his father’s advertising agency.⁵¹

In hindsight, nothing plagued the RCWCC more than its selection of Robert Waitt as its executive secretary. Proud of his Civil War lineage, Waitt eagerly touted his connections to the Union in Richmond, a city proud of its Confederate past. The descendant of two grandfathers who served the Union—one as an informant to the Union and the other in the 22nd Massachusetts—Waitt was not shy of his unorthodox heritage.⁵² The committee’s decision quickly drew the ire of the Richmond press and Confederate heritage groups.

Writing in an editorial on October 5, 1960, James J. Kilpatrick, the *Richmond News-Leader*’s editor, stated, “Meanwhile, City Council created a five-member centennial coordinating committee, headed by the beloved J. Ambler Johnston, a man who really does know something about the War. But Mr. Johnston and his brothers now have fallen into the regrettable misfortune of naming as their executive secretary a controversial Republican of Northern

⁵⁰ Waitt interview, 1994.

⁵¹ “Robert W. Waitt Jr., 78, dies,” *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 19 October 1998.

⁵² *Ibid.*

forebears, Mr. Robert Waitt; his grandfather was a Yankee.”⁵³ Kilpatrick continued, “Though Mr. Waitt was by odds the best qualified of eleven applicants for the post, in terms of his knowledge of the War, he has stirred the Sons of Confederate Veterans and the United Daughters of the Confederacy—the two groups whose cooperation is absolutely essential to any commemorative programs—to the sort of indignant wrath they once reserved for General Sherman. If Mr. Waitt’s usefulness has not been destroyed, it has been sorely impaired: and though his position seems to be no more than that of office manager or chief clerk, it might be better all around if he would execute a prudent withdrawal in the face of superior forces.”⁵⁴ From the onset of centennial planning, Kilpatrick used the editorial pages of Richmond’s afternoon daily to hound the decisions of the RCWCC. To Kilpatrick, the centennial committee had alienated key constituencies integral to a successful commemoration, such as the SCV and UDC. His words, read by many, consistently plagued the Richmond committee, even through its closing ceremony at Dogwood Dell in 1965.

Immediately following Waitt’s selection as executive secretary, members of Richmond’s heritage groups formulated their responses, taking aim at Waitt, Johnston, and committee members regarding the dubious lineage of the newly-installed executive secretary. The executive committee of the Lee-Jackson Camp of the Sons of Confederate Veterans unanimously passed a resolution demanding that Waitt be removed from his post as executive secretary of the RCWCC. Just what the consequences would be if such an action were not heeded was unclear. The camp’s adjutant commander, John C. Stinson, declared, “Waitt’s opinion of Virginia and of the Confederacy is the very same that his ancestors had who fought for the North. We feel that

⁵³ “Civil War II,” *Richmond News-Leader*, 5 October 1960.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Bob is not a true Virginian.” Stinson continued, stating that Waitt “advocated that the South was wrong, and most Virginians feel that the state was right in fighting. Richmond is going to be lost with such a person leading the centennial.”⁵⁵

During its annual convention in Roanoke, members of the Virginia Daughters of the Confederacy asserted similar charges toward Waitt, the committee, and Richmond City Council. In a unanimous resolution, the convention declared that Waitt’s “ancestors, though Virginian, were Northern sympathizers and one grandfather fought for the North. In view of the fact that Mr. Waitt will co-ordinate Centennial activities and interpret the war during the Centennial year...he is unfit for this position.”⁵⁶ Though the reactions of the SCV and UDC might seem unfounded, the groups accurately understood the significance of Waitt’s appointment. By appointing Waitt, someone who did not hold fast to Richmond’s traditional Confederate narrative, heritage groups realized that the consensus about the Lost Cause they worked so hard to establish would be in jeopardy.

For the first time since their establishment, heritage groups would not command a Civil War commemoration in Richmond. Richmond’s Civil War centennial marked a change in that local government, rather than civic organizations, would direct the city’s activities. While many, including Johnston, considered the objections of the SCV and UDC to be absurd, such groups should be credited for accurately highlighting the implications of changing just who in Richmond established the framework of the city’s commemoration.

Criticism of Ambler Johnston and his committee remained prevalent for months.

⁵⁵ “Centennial Chief’s Removal Requested,” *Richmond News-Leader*, 8 September 1960.

⁵⁶ “State UDC Fights Waitt Selection,” *Richmond News-Leader*, 7 October 1960.

Almost three months after Waitt's appointment, Johnston sought closure on the issue. In his address at the first meeting of the Richmond Civil War Centennial Advisory Committee—an extension of the RCWCC-- Johnston tried to explain his committee's decision, stating that Waitt “appeared to be the best qualified, considering his knowledge of the Civil War and his demonstrated interest in activities connected with the war.”⁵⁷ Regarding the applicants for the position, Johnston said, “Six of these were found not to have had background qualifications in Civil War history and were accordingly ruled out.”⁵⁸ He continued, “The Committee was primarily seeking a person with a more than passing knowledge of the events of the War and a person with the ability to work and to carry out at the direction of the Committee such projects and activities deemed appropriate by the Committee and City Council. It's true that the application failed to ask on which side the applicant's ancestors fought. We do not consider that it is appropriate for us today to inquire into the causes and underlying principles that motivated the actions of someone's ancestors.”⁵⁹ Johnston and the RCWCC fractured the city's consensus regarding the Civil War and its memory in Richmond. Though Johnston argued his case exhaustively over the following months, indeed even over the next few years, he was unable to ease the nerves of many in the city.

Waitt's transition from committee member to executive secretary created a vacancy on the centennial committee. In September 1960, during the midst of the controversy, Dr. William

⁵⁷ “Civil War Group Defends Choice of Secretary,” *Richmond News-Leader*, 7 November 1960.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Address of J. Ambler Johnston to the RCWCC Advisory Board*, November 6, 1960, box 5, folder 5, Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee records.

Stauffer, first appointed in April 1959, resigned from the committee, as well. In a resignation letter to Mayor Woodward, Stauffer stated that he “had accepted appointment to the commission last year to aid in the initial planning for observances ‘commemorating the spirit, valor, and sacrifice which attended the men and women of Richmond and the South’ during the Civil War.”⁶⁰ With the initial phase of planning complete and in order, Stauffer could resign having accomplished his original objective. To fill the vacancies of Waitt and Stauffer, the committee appointed Miss India Thomas, house regent of the Confederate Museum (now known as the Museum of the Confederacy,) and Saul Viener, a businessman and amateur historian. Well-respected in Richmond’s historical community, Miss Thomas had been the house regent of the Confederate Museum since 1940. There, she directed the display of Confederate items from the museum’s collection. Holding a Master’s Degree in American history from the University of West Virginia, Saul Viener was a partner in Hyman Viener & Sons, a metal refining company in Richmond. Upon the appointments of Thomas and Viener, the RCWCC was fully staffed, and remained that way for the duration of its existence.⁶¹

Fearing an inundation of tourists and a growing group of tour guides for the centennial, the RCWCC, following the lead of Robert Throckmorton, suggested Richmond City Council pass an ordinance regulating Civil War tour guides within the city’s limits. This seemingly innocent proposal would almost prove to be the undoing of the entire centennial effort. The ordinance, drafted by Richmond’s city attorney at the request of Throckmorton and the RCWCC, stated that anyone disseminating information regarding the Civil War within Richmond for

⁶⁰ “Dr. William H. Stauffer Resigns From City Civil War Commission,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 12 September 1960.

⁶¹ “2 Named to City’s Centennial Body,” *Richmond News-Leader*, 24 December 1960.

compensation must be licensed by the RCWCC. The ordinance continued, “The Committee shall investigate the qualifications of each applicant for a license with respect to his or her knowledge and ability to accurately and fairly relate or describe to others facts, information or events concerning the War Between the States and persons connected therewith. The Committee may cause examinations or tests to be conducted before issuing such licenses to ascertain whether or not applicants are qualified to engage in such activities.”⁶² For those found in violation of the ordinance, Richmond City Council could levy fines ranging from \$25 to \$500 a day.

To receive a license, an individual must have first read seven booklets, studied two historical maps, and visited historic sites and monuments throughout the city, including the former site of Libby Prison, the Battle Abbey, the Confederate Museum, and the headquarters of the Richmond National Battlefield Park among others. By enacting such an ordinance, committee and council members hoped to weed out inaccurate tour guides, as well as those that might “over-charge” tourists for information.⁶³ The ordinance passed Richmond City Council by an overwhelming margin of seven to two, with councilmen Smithers and Sadler opposing.

Already defensive over Richmond’s changing Civil War narrative, many in the city saw an opening to attack Richmond’s licensing plans on first amendment grounds. The city’s attempt to regulate tour guides provided such groups with just that opportunity. With the support of his loyal readership, the *Richmond News-Leader*’s James J. Kilpatrick led the opposition movement. Assailing the city’s ordinance as an abridgement of constitutionally protected free speech, Kilpatrick wrote, “Where was the City Attorney when the lights of free speech blinked out last

⁶² “Licensing the War,” *Richmond News-Leader*, 13 June 1961.

⁶³ “Reading List, Tour Set for Guides Here,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 11 August 1961.

night? Is there no one in City Hall capable of advising Council when it passes a monstrously unconstitutional paper such as this? The fairly incredible fact is that if Dr. Douglas Southall Freeman were to return to life today, he would have to go before Bobby Waitt, Councilman Throckmorton, and other such great authorities, and be examined by them on his qualifications to write or speak for compensation about the War of 1861-65.”⁶⁴ Outraged at what he deemed the ‘legislative itch,’ and perhaps sensing that he had struck a nerve with his readers, Kilpatrick harped on the issue relentlessly, seeking to prove what a needless and unenforceable piece of legislation City Council had endorsed. In another editorial the following afternoon, Kilpatrick attempted to force the city’s hand. The *News-Leader’s* editor wrote, “The editor of this newspaper hereby offers to accept the first invitation that may be tendered him by a civic, patriotic, or benevolent association, at a fee of \$1, to deliver a brief address entitled, ‘Facts, Information, and Events Concerning the War Between the States and Persons Connected Therewith.’ Your servant does not propose to obtain a license before undertaking fairly and accurately to relate or describe the facts, information and events aforesaid, and for this willful violation of Ordinance 61-154, he hopefully invites arrest at the hands of the dunderheads who devised this remarkable enactment.”⁶⁵

Realizing that his ally at the *News-Leader* was onto something, Councilman J. Westwood Smithers, one of two councilmen to originally oppose the ordinance, requested that City Council repeal the measure. Ordinance 61-154 soon became known as the ‘censorship’ ordinance.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, the ordinance’s chief proponent and RCWCC member, Robert Throckmorton, felt a

⁶⁴ “Licensing the War,” *Richmond News-Leader*.

⁶⁵ “Some Left-Over Outrage,” *Richmond News-Leader*, 14 June 1961.

⁶⁶ “Centennial Guide Test Law May Be Recalled,” *Richmond News-Leader*, 14 June 1961.

change in the political winds. Throckmorton explained the RCWCC merely intended to regulate paid tourist guides hired to disseminate information regarding the Civil War. The group did not intend to restrict everyone that might give information regarding the Civil War, namely guest speakers and lecturers. A savvy politician, Throckmorton blamed Richmond City Attorney Drinard. Throckmorton stated, “We told City Attorney Drinard what we wanted and if the ordinance doesn’t do that, then he fell down on the job.”⁶⁷

On June 19, 1961, a mere week after Richmond City Council passed its licensing ordinance, James Jackson Kilpatrick, good to his word, stood before Richmond’s Kiwanis Club. He proceeded to speak on Richmond’s role during the Civil War, accepting a nominal fee for his services. He obtained no license and the city made no arrest. When asked for a comment, Richmond’s City Attorney stated that the ordinance was unenforceable. Even if Kilpatrick had wanted a license, the city had yet to establish a standard for receiving one.

In the following weeks, Richmond City Council did revise the licensing ordinance, narrowing it in scope, and clarifying that licenses were meant for those compensated guides giving Civil War tours within city limits.⁶⁸ Yet, as in the case of the appointment of Waitt, Richmond’s Civil War centennial committee and its council failed to realize the gravity of its actions. With the Massive Resistance movement fresh in the minds of Richmonders, many still viewed governmental encroachment askance. Undoubtedly, Kilpatrick eloquently spoke for many in one of his last editorials on the issue:

In just such petty measures as Council enacted last night is to be found the decline of the American tradition. Freedom seldom is lost in big bites; it is nibbled away.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ “Editor Gives War Talk Without City License,” *Richmond News-Leader*, 19 June 1961.

To paraphrase Eliot, liberty does not end with a bang, but a whimper. It is the slow, insidious, creep of governmental regimentation that ought to arouse us. But men are not aroused. Our freedoms, sinking softly into the featherbeds of a thousand city councils and State assemblies, are smothered, and disappear. A drowsy people do not like to be disturbed; and Virginians who once seized muskets to fight for man's right to the pursuit of happiness now seize putters and barbecue forks instead.⁶⁹

While the issue of regulating tourism in Richmond granted the public an opportunity for a healthy debate, it also gave Robert Waitt the chance to joust privately with James Kilpatrick. Kilpatrick had publicly questioned the RCWCC's appointment of Waitt, principally because of the discord such an appointment would cause among the city's heritage groups, two groups instrumental to past commemorations within the city. However, as a Republican moderate and former candidate for state-wide office, Waitt's disdain for Kilpatrick, the author of *Massive Resistance*, likely predated Richmond's centennial.

As part of his effort to mount a legal challenge to the licensing ordinance, Kilpatrick mailed a notice to the RCWCC, Richmond's City Attorney, and Richmond's Chief of Police, announcing his plans to speak, unlicensed, before Richmond's Kiwanis Club on June 19, 1961. Kilpatrick sent the letter registered mail, which required a receipt be returned to the sender acknowledging the letter's delivery. On behalf of the RCWCC, Robert Waitt declined Kilpatrick's registered letter. In a response to Kilpatrick dated June 16, 1961, Waitt explained his decision, stating that he believed the attempt gave the Richmond editor leverage against Waitt and his committee. He then chided Kilpatrick, "If you will be so kind as to redirect your

⁶⁹ "Guide to What?" *Richmond News-Leader*, 11 July 1961.

letter through regular mail as people normally do, we will be delighted to answer it as we do the thousands of letters we have already received from people who use normal mail channels.”⁷⁰

If Waitt intended to antagonize Kilpatrick, he succeeded. In a letter addressed to Waitt the following day, Kilpatrick replied, “Your insulting and cowardly letter of June 16 is at hand. You suggest in this letter that I am the sort of person who deliberately would ‘stack the odds’ in my own favor, in order to give you ‘the short end’; that I would undertake to cheat or deceive you. What sort of man are you to impute dishonorable motives to an adversary?”⁷¹ While Kilpatrick got the last word publicly, Waitt finished the private correspondence between the two rather sarcastically, “I wish to thank you for your assistance in aiding me to secure the passage of our two ordinances Monday night. I do not know whether or not these would have passed as easily without the position you took. Again many thanks for all you did for us.”⁷²

Perhaps more interesting than the exchanges between Kilpatrick and Waitt were the correspondences between Kilpatrick and Johnston. Johnston, a well-established fixture within the upper echelon of conservative Richmond, was respected by many of the same people that adored Kilpatrick. Apparently, Kilpatrick had no apprehension of damaging his relationship with Johnston. Regarding Kilpatrick’s stand against Richmond’s licensing ordinance, Johnston wrote to Kilpatrick, “I am getting a lot of fun out of it. It seems a pity that our intentions to have taxi drivers somewhat trained has thus gone awry. Go to it Jack and I for one will be most

⁷⁰ Robert W. Waitt, Jr. to James J. Kilpatrick, June 16, 1961, box 19, folder 11, Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee Records.

⁷¹ James J. Kilpatrick to Robert W. Waitt, Jr., June 17, 1961, box 19, folder 11, Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee records.

⁷² Robert W. Waitt, Jr. to James J. Kilpatrick, July 14, 1961, box 19, folder 11, Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee records.

interested in the outcome.”⁷³ Johnston sought the high ground, seeking to minimize the situation with humor.

Kilpatrick would have none of it. In his reply to the centennial committee’s chairman, Kilpatrick wrote, “Maybe my sense of humor has deserted me, but damned if I see anything funny in this ordinance adopted by City Council the other night. The ordinance itself was preposterous, ridiculous, absurd, outrageous—pick your own adjective. In the name of God, Ambler, do you really believe that such a terrifying prospect justifies the City Council of Richmond in passing an ordinance on the subject?”⁷⁴ For Johnston, the committee’s central purpose was to see that Richmond’s visitors received accurate information regarding Richmond and the Civil War during the committee’s four years of existence. For Kilpatrick, assuring that outcome through a city ordinance had little to do with the committee’s mission.

Instead, the ordinance touched upon a greater issue. For Kilpatrick, the states’ rights Democrat, that issue was the preservation of liberty against incremental government intrusion. Kilpatrick closed his letter: “I meant what I said in one little editorial: If the Civil War Centennial Committee persists in this lunacy, I personally will do everything within my small power to compel a court test of the ordinance; I will contribute to the defense of any poor devil arrested under its terms; and I will do what I can to ridicule the committee for its foolish devotion to regimentation and its puffed up view of its own importance, and if I can make the committee a laughing stock over this, I will. That way, maybe we all can have a ‘lot of fun out

⁷³ J. Ambler Johnston to James J. Kilpatrick, June 19, 1961, box 19, folder 11, Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee records.

⁷⁴ James J. Kilpatrick to J. Ambler Johnston, June 21, 1961, Box 19, folder 11, Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee records.

of this.”⁷⁵ Though eventually revised, Ordinance 61-154 remained on the books, and approximately fifty individuals applied for the license.⁷⁶

Though Kilpatrick and the *Richmond News-Leader* spoke for Richmond’s most vocal critics of the RCWCC, they were not the only voices representing Richmond’s citizens. The city’s other daily newspaper, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, dedicated little space in its editorial pages to the committee, its efforts, or the idea of Civil War commemoration in general. With the exception of Richmond City Council’s licensing scheme, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch’s* editor, Virginius Dabney, was largely silent regarding Richmond’s Civil War centennial activities.⁷⁷

In the response of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, Dabney offered a more measured approach to Richmond City Council, as opposed to his *News-Leader* counterpart. As his suggestion, Dabney offered that council adopt a voluntary system in which the RCWCC designated as tour guides those individuals it found to be credible. However, those guides that lacked the centennial committee’s endorsement would not be forbidden from disseminating information regarding the Civil War. Rather, they would just lack the official seal of the RCWCC.⁷⁸ Dabney’s approach lacked the flair of Kilpatrick’s, however, it demonstrated that some in Richmond were interested in achieving consensus among Richmond’s Civil War enthusiasts.

Public comments regarding Richmond’s centennial plans were largely missing in the city’s African-American community. While Richmond’s Civil War centennial effort was far

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ “Reading List, Tour Set for Guides Here,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*.

⁷⁷ Virginius Dabney wrote very few editorials regarding the Civil War centennial or the efforts of the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee.

⁷⁸ “Licensing Centennial Guides,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 15 June 1961.

more inclusive than past Civil War commemorations, it failed to truly include blacks in anything more than the occasional role in a city reenactment. Richmond's black newspaper, *The Afro-American*, remained silent throughout most of the centennial, focusing more on the civil-rights issues that were captivating the country, rather than attempts by white Americans to remember their past. The few times *The Afro-American* mentioned the centennial, the paper was really referring to commemorating the anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, affirming that the African-American community was more interested in pursuing a narrative that furthered its civil rights efforts, rather than working together with the white community to advance its unity narrative of a heroic North and South.⁷⁹ Writing on the feelings of blacks toward the centennial, historian David Blight noted, "By and large, African Americans either avoided or bitterly criticized the tone and substance of the official Centennial; they often felt offended, even threatened, by a consensus evasion of the story of Emancipation in favor of efforts to forge national unity in an era of heightened anticommunism and tensions with the Soviet Union."⁸⁰

From the centennial committee's inception, Robert Waitt had an adverse effect on the committee's attempt to commemorate the Civil War. Some such as James Kilpatrick, John Stinson of the SCV, and other UDC members believed Waitt's involvement in the centennial planning spoiled Richmond's commemoration efforts entirely. Ultimately, Robert Waitt was the author of his own undoing, successfully ruining his own career in the process.

During the summer of 1964, three years into the centennial programs, Waitt's tenure as executive secretary of the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee abruptly ended when

⁷⁹ "NAACP Branches Map Fetes to Mark Emancipation," *The Afro American*, 5 January 1963.

⁸⁰ David W. Blight, *American Oracle: the Civil War in the Civil Rights Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 11.

prosecutors from the City of Richmond's Commonwealth Attorney's office submitted charges in the city's Hustings Court, alleging that Waitt raped a fourteen year-old girl earlier that year. Though charges were brought forth by only one girl, Richmond's papers reported there were other victims.⁸¹

Reaction from the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee was swift. The committee immediately suspended Waitt from his position with the committee. In an effort to notify the community of its actions, the RCWCC released a prepared statement, saying, "Robert W. Waitt, Jr., was indefinitely suspended Tuesday as Executive Secretary of the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee. The motion was taken unanimously by the committee at the close of an executive meeting held July 14 at the committee's headquarters in the Ruffner building, all members being present."⁸²

With the indefinite suspension of Waitt, the group selected Waitt's assistant, Betty Bacon, to fill the vacant role of executive secretary. Together, Bacon and committee members set about informing members of the Virginia centennial committee, as well as members of the national committee, of their grave situation. In a letter written to a young James I. Robertson, who had been tapped to serve as the executive director of the United States Civil War Centennial Committee, Ambler Johnston gloomily expressed his sentiments: "Nothing has pained me more for many a day and I crave your sympathy. The attached news clippings explain themselves. True or untrue, the Committee could not see its way to do otherwise."⁸³ Thanks to Johnston,

⁸¹ "Man, 43, Denies Statutory Rape Of 14-Year-Old," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 1 December 1964.

⁸² *Meeting Minutes of the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee*, July 14, 1964, box 1, folder 2, Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee records.

⁸³ J. Ambler Johnston to James I. Robertson, Jr., July 15, 1964, box 7, folder 1, Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee records.

Waitt had been the committee's executive secretary, and now Johnston was left to face the public alone as he attempted to continue his commemoration of Richmond. A sordid story, the Waitt case was largely ignored by Richmond's newspaper editors.

The controversy surrounding the alleged actions of Robert Waitt carried into the winter of 1964. Despite the testimony of dozens of his friends and supporters, Waitt was found guilty by a jury of his peers that December.⁸⁴ In January 1965, Judge Samuel B. Witt, Jr., sentenced Waitt to a five-year prison term.⁸⁵ With only months remaining in Richmond's centennial commemoration and the committee's largest undertaking, a pageant entitled "Richmond Under Two Flags" just ahead, Robert Waitt watched as Ambler Johnston, Saul Viener, Hobson Goddin, and Betty Bacon completed the committee's work.

Though stymied by its leadership and excoriated by one paper, the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee managed to accomplish a great deal during its short five years of existence. Despite serious distractions along the way, the RCWCC effectively carried out its mission as originally defined by the group and Richmond City Council. During an informal meeting of the RCWCC and Richmond City Council at the conclusion of the centennial, Ambler Johnston explained just what his group had achieved. "At its inception," stated Johnston, "this Committee adopted as its premise the preservation of the history of Richmond during the tragic years of 1861-1865 and the commemoration of that era. We early decided to refrain from celebrations, re-enactments, exaltation and commercialization but to concentrate on collecting, portraying the Richmond of 1861-1865, publishing and distributing maps, brochures, pictures, literature which may be passed on to the future and which, if not done now, would be lost

⁸⁴ "21 Witnesses Testify for Waitt," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 2 December 1964.

⁸⁵ "Man Given Five Years, Appeals Rape Sentence," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 7 January 1965.

forever; conducting a few dignified ceremonies, reminding the present day of the tragedies and heroics of the past, presenting through the stage and the arts some episodes which exhibited the character of Richmond.”⁸⁶

The activities of the RCWCC can be divided into four groups: publications, projects, ceremonies, and cultural programs. During its existence, the group produced significant material and programs, such as the reproduction of the minutes of Richmond’s City Council from 1861 to 1865, and the committee’s grand finale, “Richmond Under Two Flags.” With outdoor performances held throughout a week in June 1965 at Richmond’s Dogwood Dell, “Richmond Under Two Flags” was a well-produced drama that recreated the events in Richmond during the Civil War. The committee sponsored light-hearted affairs as well, including a Civil War Centennial beauty pageant, a Civil War-themed ballet performance, and a Civil War costume ball.

During its existence, the RCWCC produced a voluminous amount of publications. Led by historian and later State Archivist Dr. Louis H. Manarin, the committee edited and published the minutes of Richmond City Council from 1861 to 1865. Also, the group published several directories, including a listing of Confederate military hospitals in Richmond, a list of the civilian officials of Confederate Richmond, and a list of 100-year old businesses within the city. In addition to directories, the RCWCC printed many maps for visitors, including one for a walking tour of Richmond, one showing Civil War Richmond, and one illustrating the battlefields surrounding the city within a twenty-five mile radius.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ J. Ambler Johnston, *Speech Before Richmond City Council*, June 30 1965, box 7, folder 2, Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee records.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Early during the centennial planning, the RCWCC decided to sponsor a Civil War Centennial beauty pageant. The pageant's planners networked with the city's various ladies' groups to generate a pool of young women eager to receive the title of Miss Civil War Centennial. The winner would embody the very spirit of the Civil War centennial and would represent Richmond at various centennial functions.⁸⁸ Serious contestants submitted applications to a selection committee made up of centennial committee members and veterans of Richmond's pageant community. Along with their applications, applicants submitted two essays to the selection panel, one of which asked contestants for their favorite Civil War story, event, or personality.

The pageant's contestants, dressed in Civil War attire, gathered in a crowded ballroom in Richmond's Hotel John Marshall, to await the decision of the selection committee. The committee's Robert Throckmorton announced the selection of Jackie Allen as Miss Civil War Centennial. An employee of the City of Richmond, Jackie Allen represented the RCWCC at ceremonies and events during the centennial commemoration.⁸⁹ Throckmorton stated that she "has been selected as typifying seventeen million heroic, patriotic and courageous women of the Civil War era."⁹⁰

One of the committee's original ideas was to establish a memorial on the former site of Libby Prison. The Confederate prison was dismantled after the war and shipped to Chicago, Illinois, where it was reconstructed for tourists during the World's Fair of 1893. After some

⁸⁸ Robert W. Waitt, Jr. to Anne Duke Brickey, February 26, 1961, box 20, file 9, Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee records.

⁸⁹ "Civil War Fete Title Is Given Miss Jackie Allen," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 15 April 1961.

⁹⁰ *Richmond Civil War Centennial Pageant Script*, April 20, 1961, box 20, file 9, Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee records.

investigation, Robert Waitt discovered that after the fair, the timbers from Libby Prison were sold to two elderly women from Chicago. These ladies used the wood from Libby Prison to erect a barn in LaPorte County, Illinois. Waitt and the RCWCC were interested in purchasing the structure on behalf of Richmond, shipping it back to the city, and assembling a memorial on the prison's original site.⁹¹

However, Waitt's efforts were too late. The women had already sold the barn to a real estate developer named Charles K. Mercer. Upon reaching Mercer, Waitt discovered that the prison's new owner had other plans for the future of his recent purchase. In a letter to Waitt, Mercer informed Richmond's executive secretary of his intention to erect a restaurant with the timbers from Libby Prison. Mercer planned to name his new restaurant "Libby Prison Steak-House." According to Mercer, he would invite President Dwight Eisenhower to the grand opening of the restaurant; the event would attract national press; tourists would visit from all around to eat steak inside what was once one of the nation's most notorious prisons; and the restaurant would include a gift shop where diners could purchase Civil War souvenirs during their visit. Of his envisioned tourist mecca, Mercer stated, "I can see both as tremendous money-makers; in fact a gold mine."⁹² Yet, Mercer's dream never materialized. By year's end, the entrepreneur offered to sell the remains of Libby Prison to Richmond for the erection of a memorial or museum. However, Richmond could not secure the original prison site. Unable to

⁹¹ Robert W. Waitt, Jr. to Ella Davis, March 31 1961, box 20, file 9, Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee records.

⁹² Charles K. Mercer to Robert W. Waitt, Jr., February 19, 1964, box 19, folder 1, Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee records.

purchase the property from its owner, the RCWCC rejected Mercer's offer. Richmond erected a simple street marker by the site.⁹³

On May 30, 1962, the RCWCC held a ceremony at Richmond's Byrd Airport to unveil a new memorial commemorating the advancements made in aviation during the Civil War. The stone marker read, "Dedicated to the Intrepid and Patriotic Men, the Civil War Balloonists, Union and Confederate, Known and Unknown, who Against Ridicule and Skepticism Laid the Foundation for this Nation's Future in the Sky."⁹⁴ The names of all involved, both Union and Confederate, were listed below the inscription. Invitations were extended to Civil War centennial groups around the country, even in England. The monument was meant to commemorate the birth of military aviation in the United States, which took place at the Battle of Seven Pines on May 30, 1862.

Also in 1962, the RCWCC began what would become its most successful program of the centennial period. Members of the committee quickly realized that Richmond's plethora of Civil War sites overwhelmed the city's visitors, leaving them confused and frustrated as to where they should devote their time in the city. The RCWCC, in conjunction with the Richmond Department of Recreation and Parks, established a walking tour of Civil War Richmond, which became known as "Vignettes of the Civil War." These walking tours were reserved first to visitors of the city, while Richmond residents could participate if space allowed. "Vignettes of

⁹³ Charles K. Mercer to Elizabeth S. Bacon, November 30, 1964, box 19, folder 1, Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee records.

⁹⁴ *Inscription of the Civil War Centennial Aviation Marker*, May 1962, box 14, folder 6, Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee records.

the Civil War” were held in the spring and fall of every year from 1962 to 1965, meeting each Friday night for a ten-week period at Richmond City Hall.

There guests would listen to a short history of Civil War Richmond before embarking on a concise tour of four sites, which the committee referred to as “shrines.” These sites included the Wickham-Valentine House, the Lee House, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, and the Confederate Museum. At each site, volunteers and tour guides would give a five minute presentation to the visiting group. Upon completion of the tour, the group would meet at the Hotel Richmond—now the Ninth Street Office Building—for refreshments and a question and answer session.

During the program’s four-year run, approximately 15,000 people participated in the tours. “Vignettes of the Civil War” provided the RCWCC with a concise way to show Richmond to visitors, while allowing the committee to control the Civil War narrative participants received.⁹⁵ Interestingly, the successful program failed to include any sites significantly associated with slavery or emancipation. As a result, program participants and visitors were not forced to deal with either of these two important aspects of the Civil War. Blacks in the city would not support a commemoration that failed to address the two key issues closest to them.

As the close of the centennial commemoration approached, the RCWCC launched its largest project to date. Armed with a \$5,000 budget and approximately 200 volunteers, sub-committee chairman Saul Viener began to plan “Richmond Under Two Flags,” a twelve-scene dramatic presentation of Richmond during the Civil War. The production was held each evening

⁹⁵ *Overview of “Vignettes of the Civil War,”* provided by Xenophon Morris, Spring 1962, box 24, folder 8, Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee records.

from June 16 through June 19 at the Dogwood Dell amphitheater in Byrd Park. “Richmond Under Two Flags” would include recognizable scenes from Richmond’s history including the Secession Convention, the bread riot, the evacuation of Richmond and arrival of President Lincoln, and Lee’s farewell to his troops. The presentation would begin with the Secession Convention and the hoisting of the Confederate flag. It would end with the lowering of the flag, the raising of the American flag, and the playing of “America the Beautiful.” With “Richmond Under Two Flags,” the RCWCC would attempt to place its stamp upon Richmond’s new Civil War narrative, emphasizing reconciliation, unity, shared sacrifice and heroism by all involved. Speaking of his hopes for the upcoming presentation and what it would accomplish, Johnston said, “We have been working during the Civil War Centennial and realize now that we have witnessed what is really, to paraphrase, the Birth of a Nation. We have witnessed something that has taken a divided nation and made one of it, and it is so far back that all rancor etc. has long been forgotten.”⁹⁶ Yet, not all agreed with Johnston that such strides had been made, including Betty Bacon, the newly-appointed executive secretary of the RCWCC, who thought that plenty of animosity remained between various factions regarding the Civil War.⁹⁷

The committee did make a concerted effort to include the African-American community in the final program. Saul Viener met twice with Harry Williams, principal of Maggie L. Walker High School, to discuss the possible involvement of black students in “Richmond Under Two Flags.” From these discussions, the two men formed a small committee, including teachers from Maggie Walker and the Randolph School. Together, they reached a consensus that the

⁹⁶ *Meeting Minutes of the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee*, June 1965, box 1, folder 3, Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee records.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

program would include “no negro dialect; no comedy at the expense of the Negro; and no costuming in the “Mammy” or field-hand style.”⁹⁸ The final casting report does include a reference to thirty-seven African-American participants. However, it is unclear whether these were actual participants, or merely a number that Viener and the casting committee hoped would participate.

As the lights came up on the opening night on June 16, 1965, J. Ambler Johnston rose to address the crowd. After explaining the coming presentation, he stressed to the viewers that the RCWCC had focused its centennial efforts on commemoration, rather than celebration, not referring to victors or the vanquished, but to the bravery and personal sacrifice of both North and South. His profound hope was that the centennial would mark a new day when Civil War commemoration could focus on national unity, rather than sectional pride.⁹⁹

However, Johnston’s hopes were not to be, as the RCWCC’s plans were soon shattered by the crowd. During the final scene of the presentation, a narrator read Father Ryan’s “The Conquered Banner.” As the RCWCC commenced in 1961 with a reading of this very poem, so too the committee hoped to close the centennial, staying true to its original intent to lower the flag and focus on a new day of Civil War commemoration. As the narrator read, volunteers began to lower the Second National Flag of the Confederacy. However, according to bystanders, many in attendance, caught up in the emotions of the moment, charged forward, disrupting the play and forcibly preventing the lowering of the Confederate flag. As the crowd dispersed, the

⁹⁸ *Casting Report for “Richmond Under Two Flags,”* June 1965, box 22, folder 4, Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee records.

⁹⁹ *Opening Remarks of J. Ambler Johnston,* June 1965, box 22, folder 4, Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee records.

Confederate flag remained, flying over the former capital one final time.¹⁰⁰ A century later, Richmond had changed, but not that much. Despite the best efforts of J. Ambler Johnston and the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee, Richmond was still unwilling to “furl that banner.”

In retrospect, Richmond’s Civil War commemorations had changed significantly since the days of tending Confederate graves in cemeteries, or parading down grand avenues under the watchful eyes of marble statues. J. Ambler Johnston and his contemporaries deserve credit for constructing Richmond’s first serious commemoration of the Civil War, apart from the city’s heritage groups. The RCWCC managed to orchestrate some quality events, as well as publish useful information for Richmond’s residents and visitors. Like its national counterpart, the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee encountered fierce opposition. Yet, it managed to avoid the racial antagonism that the USCWCC faced, instead receiving criticism from its right as to the legitimacy and authenticity of its “reconciliation” narrative. The committee’s avoidance of racial conflict was but a Pyrrhic victory, as it achieved this goal by ignoring important issues of race, slavery, and emancipation entirely. As a result, the committee’s reinterpretation of Richmond’s Civil War commemoration into a “reconciliation” narrative was rendered outdated by civil rights victories just as the centennial closed. Historians and civic leaders would quickly view the “reconciliation” narrative as exclusive.

Though the committee did not sway everyone, it did manage to shift the model for how Richmond could commemorate the Civil War. Without the committee’s efforts, Richmond would have been content to merely reinforce its past narrative of Confederate celebration. In effect, the efforts of the RCWCC laid the foundation for future commemoration groups to

¹⁰⁰ Peter Rippe, interview by author, December 6, 2010, Richmond, digital recording.

expand the historical narrative and consider new aspects regarding Richmond and its role in the Civil War.

Chapter Three: With Eyes Toward the Future--the Legacy of the RCWCC

As Richmond's commemoration of the Civil War centennial closed, practical questions emerged, such as finding a final destination for the history accumulated by the RCWCC, as well as, what, if any, lasting legacy the committee would leave to Richmond. Members of the RCWCC advocated for the creation of a Richmond Department of Archives and Records. Such a department would catalog the centennial committee's many boxes of documents attained over the past four years. As with many of the RCWCC's proposals, there were critics to obstruct this vision from becoming reality. In addition to tracing the final days of the RCWCC, this chapter will examine Richmond's present-day attempt to commemorate the sesquicentennial of the Civil War, and determine what, if any, impact the RCWCC has had on the city's current commemoration. Lastly, this chapter will consider the prospects of future Civil War commemorations in Richmond.

Few involved in public history, especially volunteers not trained in the field, consider the possible effects of their actions on future generations. Most responsible for planning ceremonies, conducting tours, or designing monuments, only consider their immediate audience and their reaction at the present. They do not consider the interpretation of what they are presenting or the effect of that interpretation on people in the future.

Of all those involved in Richmond's Civil War centennial planning, no one was more conscious of his actions and their possible impact on future generations than J. Ambler Johnston. The RCWCC's chairman believed his commission had succeeded for the first time in gathering Richmond's Civil War history in a central location. In addition to the diaries, photos, maps, and letters dating to the Civil War compiled in its four years of research, the committee produced its own sizable collection of meeting

minutes, copies of correspondence, event programs, and lectures. By the time of its disbandment, the committee had amassed dozens of neatly organized boxes, effectively comprising the institutional history of Richmond's attempt to commemorate the Civil War at its centennial.

In an address before City Council in the winter of 1965, Johnston proposed an endeavor that he believed would secure the RCWCC's efforts and ensure that its work be available to future generations of Richmonders. Johnston stated, "Our last, but we think major contribution, will be and is the suggestion that you the Council undertake as your own project within the City government and directly under the Council, the establishment of a permanent agency of record of Archives, to collect and preserve the history of Richmond and do what should have been done these 200 years: have a place of deposit of history as it is being made every day. As it is now, there is no agency in Richmond to take the material that this Committee has compiled over the last five years and all that we can see to do with it is to pack it in boxes and put it away, perhaps somewhere in a basement."¹⁰¹ Johnston stressed that such a creation would not compete with other institutions in the city that housed pieces of Richmond's history, groups such as the Valentine Museum, the Virginia Historical Society, and the Virginia State Library. Rather, this new agency would hold all of Richmond's history in one central location, complementing the other institutions. Furthermore, Johnston clarified, "This office should be conducted by highly trained and learned personnel on a level with such as Williamsburg, University of Virginia, Virginia State Library or Virginia Historical Society. It is no job for a ribbon clerk."¹⁰² Johnston's comments suggest that he understood the necessity of employing public historians and the importance these historians would have on the gathering and interpretation of the city's history for future generations of Richmonders.

¹⁰¹ J. Ambler Johnston, *Speech Before Richmond City Council*, February 10 1965, box 7, folder 2, Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee records.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

Yet, the establishment of such a repository would not be the lasting legacy of J. Ambler Johnston. Through the final years of the Civil War centennial, the idea of having a department in the city dedicated to the gathering of records had been suggested. Not everyone agreed that Johnston's motives were so pure. In the summer of 1964, prior to the indictment of Robert Waitt, James J. Kilpatrick suggested the RCWCC had ulterior motives in proposing such a department. Writing of the plans to create a Department of Archives and Records, Kilpatrick suggested:

This is to take care of Councilman Throckmorton's good friend, Bobby Waitt. Mr. Waitt is now ensconced in one comfortable job, as executive secretary of the Civil War Centennial Committee. Obviously, the Civil War Centennial will last for only another year. Hence another comfortable job must be lined up for Bobby. What could be greater than a Department of Archives and Records? With Bobby as director?¹⁰³

Kilpatrick supported his accusation by noting that the RCWCC's suggested start date for such a department was July 1, 1965—the very day after the dissolution of the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee. Robert Waitt could transition seamlessly from one job into another job.

However, if there was ever intent to create a Richmond Department of Archives and Records with Waitt at the helm, his indictment and conviction in late 1964 ended any speculation. Ambler Johnston, without Waitt at his side, would still seek to persuade City Council to create just such an agency in the early months of 1965. On June 30, 1965, the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee dissolved, just as planned. To Ambler Johnston's dismay, the committee's records began a long drift between governments and agencies. After spending several years with the city of Richmond, the boxes of records were transferred temporarily to the Valentine Museum, before finding a permanent new home at the Library of Virginia.

¹⁰³ "Bulding a Bobby-Nest," *Richmond News-Leader*, 25 May 1964.

Whether they are referred to as celebrations or commemorations, what is certain is that Richmond's memory of the Civil War and the city's role in it has changed. From the solemn post-war ceremonies in the city's cemeteries to the parades of Confederate veterans down Monument Avenue to the efforts of the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee, different groups have taken command of the city's Civil War history at different times. As Richmond prepared to commemorate the sesquicentennial of the Civil War, the gatekeepers to Richmond's Civil War past would change again.

Unlike Richmond's Civil War centennial, Richmond's government has not planned and implemented the city's sesquicentennial. Rather universities, historical societies, museums, and tourism organizations have taken command. Together, they have formed *The Future of Richmond's Past*, an organization tasked with leading a collaborative effort to construct the framework by which the city views the sesquicentennial. Whereas some think past attempts to remember the Civil War have resulted in a celebration of Richmond's Confederate heritage, *The Future of Richmond's Past* has labeled the sesquicentennial as a commemoration meant as a time of remembering the past, as opposed to a time of celebrating it.¹⁰⁴

As the sesquicentennial approached, a frequent criticism of the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee has been its complete avoidance of emancipation and the issue of slavery in general. The RCWCC focused primarily on the military and political history of Confederate Richmond. In an effort to counter this perspective and capture an inclusive view of Richmond's history, *The Future of Richmond's Past* has expanded the scope of the commemoration to include emancipation, in addition to Civil War.

To foster a greater understanding for what the sesquicentennial of the Civil War and emancipation means to different people, *The Future of Richmond's Past* has hosted a series of community conversations throughout the city in an attempt to have people dialogue about the meaning of the war,

¹⁰⁴ Information regarding the sesquicentennial and *The Future of Richmond's Past* can be found at <http://futureofrichmondspast.org>.

slavery, and its consequences. The group has held the events at a variety of venues throughout the city, from the University of Richmond in the West End, to Virginia Commonwealth University in the city's urban center, to Union Presbyterian Seminary in Northside, and at sites in the city's East End. Each venue has attracted a different demographic, each with their own ideas of what war and emancipation have meant to them.

Also, the group has organized three successful events; each held in April and entitled Civil War & Emancipation Day. During the day, the city's Civil War-related sites were open, free of charge, to visitors. Living history interpreters provided demonstrations for the public. Visitors were encouraged to walk the city's slave trail and visit the Lumpkins Jail archaeological site to learn more about the city's expansive slave trade in Shockoe Bottom. Able to visit Richmond's Civil War sites in one day, a visitor is better able to understand just how so many of these sites are connected, creating a larger narrative of liberty that one can see advancing in Richmond throughout the city's history.

The planners of the sesquicentennial have faced some of the same issues as their predecessors. Primarily, both groups have dealt with how to sustain interest in the Civil War over such a protracted amount of time. Whereas the centennial's planners freely acknowledged the likelihood of a dip in interest in the commemoration between the event's opening and closing ceremonies, the sesquicentennial's planners have managed to maintain an intense interest in the Civil War anniversary so far.

More than great programming, what has driven the interest in the sesquicentennial is the organization's emphasis on race, slavery, and emancipation. By expanding the themes of the sesquicentennial and creating a dialogue between different groups of people with varying perspectives, the public has an opportunity to reevaluate historical narratives and determine what should be added or revised in its historical narrative. Adding issues such as race, slavery, and emancipation has created a multi-dimensional narrative to replace the static, two-dimensional brothers' war narrative of the centennial years. For the first time, African-Americans have had a real voice in shaping Richmond's

collective memory of the Civil War. By opening up the discussion to African-Americans and to women, Richmond has approached its history in a whole new manner and appeal to an entirely new demographic that was absent from its past.

Peter Rippe, who was director of the Confederate Museum during the Civil War centennial, stated about the sesquicentennial, “I am now very much impressed, in planning for the sesquicentennial, that it is to be a commemoration that will include, will be inclusive, it is inclusive. I have been to many meetings in *The Future of Richmond’s Past* and I’ve had a feeling of inclusiveness. The slave trail, the fact that the African American heroes are being honored in a way that they weren’t even being thought about in 1961-65.”¹⁰⁵ A reaction to the centennial committee’s top down history, *The Future of Richmond’s Past* has taken a bottom up approach to Richmond’s Civil War history. By the reaction of visitors, the sesquicentennial’s planners have succeeded in creating a commemoration Richmond can rally behind.

When speaking of Richmond’s centennial today, the greatest criticism is the centennial committee’s blind eye toward race and Richmond’s role in slavery. The African American community had little to no input during the four years from 1961 to 1965. Other than some discussion as to how blacks would not be portrayed in the RCWCC’s production of “Richmond Under Two Flags,” there was no reference to African American involvement during the centennial years. As David Blight has noted, “But in the period of the Centennial, from the 1950s to the mid-1960s, the two phenomena (Civil War and civil rights) were too often like planets in separate orbits around different suns.”¹⁰⁶

Several figures either directly involved in the centennial or on its periphery have commented regarding this lack of involvement. Speaking of the absence of the black community in the

¹⁰⁵ Peter Rippe, interview by author, December 6, 2010, Richmond, digital recording.

¹⁰⁶ David W. Blight, *American Oracle: Civil War in the Civil Rights Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2.

commemoration, Peter Rippe stated, “I do not remember any discussion at any meeting about the subject of slavery or the subject of the civil rights movement. I do not think that African-Americans were involved at all in the planning of the centennial.”¹⁰⁷ Of J. Ambler Johnston, Rippe continued, “He was interested in the battlefields. He was interested in the history, and somehow slavery and especially, the racial problem did not enter into his way of thinking.”¹⁰⁸ Regarding the question of whether there was any kind of racial conflict in the centennial commemoration, Robert Waitt responded, “No, we never did, and I had very good connections with the black community because I worked for many years with the Afro-American newspaper. They sort of just ignored it.”¹⁰⁹

However, a failure to comment on the centennial should not be mistaken for an endorsement. A review of the *Afro-American* shows few references to Richmond’s Civil War centennial commemoration. When the commemoration was mentioned, it was regarding the issue of emancipation. In these cases, the loudest voice is the one not heard. The RCWCC’s vice-chairman, C. Hobson Goddin, mentioned that the committee did attempt to reach out to the African-American community regarding participation in the centennial; however, those contacted did not want anything to do with Richmond’s sanctioned commemoration events.¹¹⁰ It is difficult to ascertain the sincerity of those that attempted to secure the input of the black community, but in fairness to those that planned the centennial, it was unlikely that, even had they wanted African-American input, they would have received any kind of significant involvement during the civil rights era.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Robert W. Waitt, Jr., interview by John M. Coski and Tucker H. Hill, 8 February 1994, The Museum of the Confederacy.

¹¹⁰ C. Hobson Goddin, interview by author, March 12, 2012, Richmond, digital recording.

Furthermore, with only a century separating them from the institution of slavery and the war itself, there was still too much of an emotional connection for Richmond to address race and slavery in the manner in which the sesquicentennial has done today. In his work on Civil War, emancipation, and public memory, historian David Blight has noted a delay among the general American public in accepting a more inclusive historical narrative. Blight states, “What may seem relatively settled understandings among scholars, even in the midst of rich debate, rarely means that anything is settled in the broader world of social memory.”¹¹¹ In the early 1960s, there was still no consensus as to what should be included in Civil War commemorations. As Americans wrestled with ideas such as integration and the end of Jim Crow laws, many were still uneasy of the addition of emancipation into the traditionally white narrative.

Today’s sesquicentennial is often viewed as an opportunity to right what the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee got wrong fifty years ago. Critics say that, fifty years ago, Richmond celebrated its Confederate past. Critics say that, fifty years ago, Richmond focused too much on its military and wartime strategy. Critics say that, fifty years ago, Richmond missed its chance to face its demons, deal with its slave trade past, and acknowledge the conflict between the races.

Indeed, the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee did fail to do all these things. However, those on the RCWCC would have insisted that they too were commemorating Richmond’s Civil War history. Though they did not commemorate emancipation, they would have argued that they were commemorating a struggle between two groups, North and South. The committee’s efforts were an attempt to honor those who fought on opposing sides of the conflict. For the first time, Richmond was not merely celebrating the Confederacy; it was paying respect to all those whose lives were altered due to the bloody conflict. In this way, the RCWCC was innovative, breaking with Richmond’s traditions, ensuring that Richmond’s centennial commemoration was broader than any previous celebration. In this

¹¹¹ Blight, 3.

way, the RCWCC blazed a trail that would allow *The Future of Richmond's Past* to expand the narrative even more during the sesquicentennial. To date, this legacy of the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee has been unrecognized.

By its very nature, public history is political. Many times, public history is formed from the work of politicians, their volunteers, or their constituents. With the expansion of civil rights and a greater influence from women in the public sphere, history reflects the various groups that make up the body politic. It is unsurprising that Richmond's sesquicentennial has focused so much on social history, telling the stories of everyday people from all walks of life, and trying to make up for one-hundred and fifty years of lopsided narratives.

However, in its effort to compensate for the sins and omissions of the RCWCC, Richmond's sesquicentennial planners have swung the pendulum too far to the other side of the spectrum. Just as the centennial focused almost exclusively battles and political decisions, so the sesquicentennial has focused too much on everyday people and social history. While the inclusion of social history, the incorporation of emancipation, and the consideration of race are welcomed and commendable, Richmond should recognize the place of military and political history as well. There should be a place for these topics in Richmond's future commemorations.

For even greater progress on future Civil War commemorations, Richmond must work to move that historical pendulum back to a healthy center, where commemorations would be a blending of military and social history. This would provide visitors with an even fuller historical narrative than the one currently offered during the sesquicentennial. With a greater understanding of Richmond's Civil War Centennial Committee, perhaps people will not see the committee as a stumbling block to prevent broader discussions, but as a committee that lit the way for other organizations to expand Richmond's historical narrative and explain what commemoration truly means

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