Jabriel M. Hasan

A Story of Richmond, Virginia: Its Southern Origins and Black Tenacity

Abstract: This chapter is a case study that examines the conceptual origins, racialized memories and black healing strategies of the American South, with a focus on Richmond, Virginia and its black American experience related to the legacies of enslavement. Considering the seminary environment that became an incubator for the chapter's initial manifestation, and the church's role in developing the theological, legal and social frameworks for enslavement, the analysis in this chapter centres Christianity and its ongoing impact. Historical insights and local narratives are used to track the emergence and divergence of Southern consciousness, and to ground the presentation of black outlooks in reconciling the trauma of regional, racialized oppression. The study culminates with an attempt to contextualize and conceptualize the New South, observing Richmond, the once capital of the Confederacy, as a microcosm. The conclusion arises that better understanding the South's past enlightens its future.

Keywords: The South, Southern, enslavement, race, healing.

Introduction

> ...[T]he past can never die because it still exists, intact, on some other plane of time, around which we cannot see directly. But even if this were not true, the past cannot ever be wholly dead for it lives in us, in our blood, in the things whose heirs we are; and the ghosts of old fears and old joys shall forever haunt us.[1] – Clarence John Laughlin

Richmond, Virginia's capital, sits just under sixty miles from the Jamestown colony, where the English crown staked its first permanent North American settlement in 1607. The city lies only 80 miles inland from Fort Monroe's shores, where the first

Rev. **Jabriel Malik Hasan** is a community healer and advocate whose heart for service has extended to various pursuits, including being a Resident in Counselling, a lay leader in The Episcopal Church, and an ordained interfaith minister. Jabriel serves as Co-Chair for the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia's Truth and Reparations Task Force and an alumni representative to Union Presbyterian Seminary's Board of Trustees (M.Div., '22). He is a recent graduate of William & Mary (M.Ed., '24). He is the author of numerous local publications.

1 Laughlin (1961). *Ghosts along the Mississippi* (p. 8).

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Africans in Virginia disembarked from the White Lion in 1619. Richmond's peculiar history remains shackled at once to ivory pillars and BIPOC bones,[2] tied to the past amidst time's inevitable progress. Attempts at healing often result in circular, frustrated conversations or shy, conciliatory efforts lacking response to fundamental causes. The colonizing impulse so foundational to Richmond's formation results in co-opting, contributing much to the progressive community's inability to uproot the culprit. Marches, protests, seminars and online conversations broadcast issues, yet the haunting persists. Meanwhile, dogwalkers traipse over African Burial Ground graves.

Aside from location, Richmond's heritage positions the area within the larger Southern context. While the mixture of climate, cultures and slaveocracy's vestiges grounds this orientation, the city's historic hospitality to the Confederacy may constitute the core element. Richmond sheltered, churched and memorialized the Confederacy—a rule of order and regional unity in which the South's historical hegemonic identity found refuge. While various ethnicities form the Southern populace and contribute to its character, "the South" as a notion emerged out of white, aristocratic claims to regional exceptionalism in slaveocracy's defence. To assuage fears of abolition and, later, the grief born of wartime defeat, white Southerners developed both a reasoned and medievally romantic mythos to justify lifestyles and ideologies based on two of the most severe atrocities yet known to humanity: the Indigenous genocide and the transatlantic and domestic trade of enslaved Africans. The persistent, insistent, holistic and largely successful cultural annihilation campaigns still being waged on these ethnic bodies affirm the distinct severity of these efforts. In this regard, pervasive systems and insidious manners of exploitation form the South.

Grief manifests the Southern wound. This grief entails the complex interplay of decaying romanticized notions of a lost civilization, the trauma arising from racial oppression, and the moral injury induced from perpetuating such oppression. Southern healing depends on the community's capacity to know and understand the region's distorted consciousness, grasping the impact of trauma to strategize the development of a redeemed civilization out of the decay, breakthroughs and hope.

Considering that the healing necessarily begins with our own embodied realities, a black, Southern, Richmond perspective undergirds this study. Initially written in a seminary setting, a markedly religious influence is maintained, with Christian features appearing throughout. The narrative told is a story of Richmond, although not the only. The analysis does not try to be exhaustive in

2 BIPOC refers to Black, Indigenous, People of Colour.

scope nor comprehensive in its attention to the rich ethnic tapestry covering the southern United States. The aim is that the South as a macrocosm will be better understood through the microcosm of a particular narrative. For clarity's sake, this discourse employs racialized categories to observe the formation of two storylines that comingle and contrast in a shared place and, at times, space. That particularity, blurred by overarching local and regional contexts, manifests differing identities and memories. To trace this phenomenon's emergence, this case study examines the origins of the "South" concept, its antebellum (e. g. before the civil war) blossoming, its flourishing through the Lost Cause and New South(s) era,[3] and the ensuing racial narrative dichotomy. The chapter concludes by focusing on black trauma, healing and tenacity, highlighting the work of black women who lead the way forward.

The Emergence of "the South": Its Identities and Memories

What and how Southerners choose to remember shapes Southern identities. Abolitionism's perceived invasion inaugurated the South concept, awakening a beast of defensive posturing steered by white elites. Religious justification provided framers with moral backing for their positions. Even after emancipation, white people retained historiographic privilege through legally enforced dominance, which included greater access to education and literacy. Social advantage allowed white Southerners to form narratives that styled a romanticized regional mythos into history. White Southern speeches remain invaluable resources for analysis, but their stories reveal the perspectives of those wielding institutionalized social and cultural power. Holding these sources in conversation with black Southern oral narratives displays the cognitive dissonance pervading white Southern memories. By accounting information customarily left untold, historical records spotlighted by some progressive scholars help to fill the void left by the countless muted black witnesses. Synthesizing historical record with white and black narratives reveals that Southern identity is an interplay of alternate realities emerging out of conflicting, yet proximate, communities that are united by intersecting histories.

3 The term first appeared in the book entitled "The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates" written by the Virginian journalist Edward A. Pollard, published in 1866. It thereafter has been regarded as a myth. It not only serves to rationalize the Confederacy's defeat, but also intends to justify white supremacy, thus denying the moral failures of slavery.

Conceptual Origins of the South

Origins of the South as a concept may be traced from the late medieval papal bulls to plantation parlours and cotton fields. At the end of the Middle Ages, the church developed a solid religious legal precedent for the enslavement and colonization of non-Christian people and lands. Pope Nicholas V's papal bull of 1452, *Dum Diversas*, granted Portugal's King Alfonso V power to invade foreign spaces and conquer all non-Christians to force them into perpetual servitude. Grouping all non-Christians among "the enemies of Christ", the church gave a monarchy free reign to rob invaded territories of people and possessions, with no respect for existing political dominions in conquered territories. The papal bull reads:

> [W]e grant to you full and free power, through the Apostolic authority by this edict, to invade, conquer, fight, subjugate the Saracens and pagans, and other infidels and other enemies of Christ, and wherever established their Kingdoms, Duchies, Royal Palaces, Principalities and other dominions, lands, places, estates, camps and any other possessions, mobile and immobile goods found in all these places and held in whatever name, and held and possessed by the same Saracens, Pagans, infidels, and the enemies of Christ, also realms, duchies, royal palaces, principalities and other dominions, lands, places, estates, camps, possessions of the king or prince or of the kings or princes, and to lead their persons in perpetual servitude, and to apply and appropriate realms, duchies, royal palaces, principalities and other dominions, possessions and goods of this kind to you and your use and your successors the Kings of Portugal.[4]

The "salvation of their souls" undergirded this economic endeavour, providing a moral basis for exploitation with the guidance that it served to "restrain the savage excesses of the Saracens and infidels" and expand Christendom. In 1455, *Romanus Pontifex* followed *Dum Diversas*, reiterating its claims, establishing bargaining power for the conquered and instating King Alfonso's claim more broadly through all sub-Saharan Africa.[5] All lands, peoples and possessions south of the Cape of Bojador, now Western Saharan Moroccan territory, became divinely sanctioned for conquest. Control mechanisms imposed included the forbidden sale of iron, weaponry and wood to conquered peoples, serving to further perpetuate their oppressed status. *Dum Diversas* and *Romanus Pontifex* function as core documents for the Doctrine of Discovery's formation,[6] setting a religious precedent for

4 Unam Sanctam Catholicam (2011, 5 February). *Dum Diversas (English Translation).*

5 "From the capes of Bojador and of Não, as far as through all Guinea, and beyond toward that southern shore", from Papal Encyclicals Online (2017). *Romanus Pontifex. (Granting the Portuguese a perpetual monopoly in trade with Africa). January 8, 1455.*

6 The Papal Doctrine of Discovery in 1400s was used as legal and moral justification for colonial dispossession of sovereign Indigenous Nations.

European-led colonization and enslavement as other western dominions on the continent, namely Spain, France and England, sought claim to foreign lands that black and brown people occupied.[7] In its global, ethnic and territorial outlook, the paternalism entrenched in white Southern identity draws its lineage from said papal bulls.

Shaping the (Old) South

Codes governing enslaved people of African descent set a social, racialized and religious standard that concretized white Southern identity in relation to black people. The "slave codes" began appearing in Virginia in 1642,[8] gradually forming into a comprehensive structure by 1705. As the codes developed, they instituted fixed racialized distinctions between white and black. They came to nearly synonymize white with "Christian" and black with "slave". The language and stipulations relegated blacks to the lowest social order and engineered white hegemony. Even after black conversions to Christianity, black people remained enslaved and white being was read as most fully embodying Christianity.

The juxtaposition between black and "Christian", first appeared in 1661 with a code pertaining to black runaways and "Christian servants in company with them".[9] The 1662 code assailed black freedom prospects and safeguarded rapes by white men, ensuring that intercourse between a white man and enslaved black woman still rendered the offspring enslaved. In 1667, the Virginia House of Burgesses clarified that baptism failed to free an enslaved person from legal bondage. The 1671 code established the status of a black African as enslaved upon arrival to the colony.[10] In 1680, fear of insurrections by those enslaved brought a law banning black people from bearing arms and fighting white people.[11]

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7 Concerning the Doctrine of Discovery, see Campbell (2012). *Richmond's unhealed history* (p. 154). For more on early European colonial endeavours specific to *Dum Diversas* and *Romanus Pontifex*, see also LDHI (n.d.). *African laborers for a New Empire: Iberia, slavery, and the Atlantic world. Pope Nicolas V and the Portuguese slave trade.*

8 Before 1662, the laws focused much attention on enslaved black people who ran away, suggesting that covert black resistance strategies caused considerable concern for colonial, white Virginians. Fear of interracial collaboration against oppression also triggered the establishment of harsh legal precedents in 1660 and 1661 against English runaways in company with black runaways. See California State University, Long Beach. (n.d.). *Virginia slave and indenture laws.*

9 California State University, Long Beach. (n.d.). *Virginia slave and indenture laws.*

10 Trammell (2012). *The Richmond slave trade: The economic backbone of the old dominion* (p. 20).

Stipulations in 1705 served to constitute whiteness, define white servitude and fully secure the slaveocracy's governance over black and mixed-race people.[12] "The code introduced the word 'white' into Virginia law",[13] distinguishing white servitude and the "slave" status assigned to the aforementioned groups. White servitude yielded greater dignity and privilege, whereas the colony went to great lengths to ensure black bondage and debasement. The law barred masters from whipping white Christian servants naked without court order but granted reparations to enslavers in the case that the black person they enslaved was killed in the course of legal redress, whether by the enslaver or the colonial government.[14] By 1723, Virginia law had barred even free blacks from voting.[15] That colonists felt a need for these laws alludes to the persistent attempts by black people to subvert the dominant order. The codes governing black being functioned to forge a separation between the ruled and the subjugated, allowing religious alienation, disenfranchisement, violence, rape and death to be inflicted upon black people. The law served to impress on the white Southern consciousness a sense of righteousness associated with these actions, justifying a legally delineated and religiously sanctioned racialized hierarchy that white Southerners celebrated during the antebellum period and that was echoed in Lost Cause ideology.

The Virginia State Capitol's move from Williamsburg to Richmond in 1780 preceded the economic boom in the domestic trade of enslaved black people, which grounded white Southern identity. This transition shifted economic focus to the once sleepy colonial settlement. Just preceding the capital's relocation, the importation of enslaved Africans to the state was legally banned in 1778. By 1808, the Jefferson administration allowed a national ban on said importation, shifting traders' legal business prospects to the domestic realm. The antebellum period saw Virginia's rise as a leader among states in the domestic trade of enslaved blacks—second only to New Orleans.[16] Jack Trammell remarked that "Virginia's chief antebellum export was not cotton, tobacco, or corn, but human labor."[17]

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11 Contrasting the "happy slave" myth, Mary Miley Theobold noted that "there was in colonial Virginia a relentless fear of slave uprisings": Theobold (2006). Slave conspiracies in Colonial Virginia.

12 "Mulattos" were the archaic term for mixed-race people.

13 Campbell (2012). *Richmond's unhealed history* (p. 72).

14 Encyclopedia Virginia. (n.d.) *"An act concerning servants and slaves" (1705).*

15 Encyclopedia Virginia. (n.d.) *"An act directing the trial of slaves, committing capital crimes; and for the more effectual punishing conspiracies and insurrections of them; and for the better government of negros, mulattos, and Indians, bond or free" (1723).*

16 Trammell (2012), p. 9.

17 Trammell (2012), p. 87.

The frenzied demand for enslaved labour also catalyzed enslavers' practice of enforced rape and reproduction among those enslaved, a system otherwise known as "slave breeding".[18] Virginia led the nation in this abuse.[19] The value assigned to enslaved bodies steered the avarice that drove the trading market. Trammell notes that "on the typical southern plantation with twenty slaves, the slaves themselves (or their hired labor) were worth more than the total value of the land and implements combined".[20] The trade's economic power statewide and nationally dismantles the notion that the practice would have soon died out with or without the Civil War. Accounting only for Richmond, total gross proceeds in sales from the slave trade in some years equalled $500 million in 2011 dollars.[21]

Nevertheless, Richmond was only one locus in the larger Southern territory. By 1860, on the eve of the war, enslaved people were the nation's largest financial asset, with cotton, the blossom of their sweat, its largest export. White Southern anxiety concerning emancipation finds root in the enormous economic downturn feared,[22] which reconstruction eventually actualized. The South maintained its greatest source of wealth through the trade of enslaved people.[23] "It is little wonder that [white Southerners] chafed beneath the notion of abolition, the economic equivalency of socializing an entire multimillion-dollar (perhaps even billion-dollar) private business sector."[24] The domestic trade of enslaved black people, as a catalyst for the region's economic progress and safeguard for financial security, gave birth to the South concept.

Virginia foundationally shaped white Southern identity in the Upper South, setting a tone for the southern region even more prominently once the state became the Confederacy's burial place. South Carolina, however, played a central role in steering white Southern antebellum consciousness. Clifton Ellis and Gina Haney assert that South Carolinian rhetoric via Charleston inspired the initial manifestation of the South concept. That South Carolina stands on record as the first seceding state from the Union and the site of the war's beginning supports the authors' position. "Charleston was the epicentre for Southern apologists who consistently used medieval imagery as a means to explain and celebrate a culture

18 Sublette & Sublette (2016). *The American slave coast: A history of the slave-breeding industry* (p. 3). "[I]t is forced mating: enslaved women could be assigned to enslaved men by slaveowners, or impregnated by white men who had access to them"; Sublette & Sublette (2016), p. 24.
19 Trammell (2012), p. 9.
20 Trammell (2012), p. 91.
21 Trammell (2012), p. 97.
22 Trammell (2012), p. 90.
23 Trammell (2012), p. 90.
24 Trammell (2012), p. 86.

made possible by an economic system based in slavery."[25] They further explain that:

> [T]hese apologists turned to the Middle Ages for a defense of their economic system. Slaveholders extolled the Middle Ages for what they believed to be an ideal social system —an organic, reciprocal social relationship between vassal and lord that, to their minds, was not unlike the society they had created in the American South.[26]

Ellis and Haney note that a volatile cocktail incited a fire of Southern apologist writings and aesthetics to illustrate the ideology. Charles Reagan Wilson commented that "the driving force propelling southern identity was racial fear".[27] The Missouri Compromise in 1820, curtailing Southern, "slave state" expansion; Denmark Vesey's 1822 insurrection, reminding enslavers of black resistance and resilience; economic fluctuations in the global market in 1819 and 1824–27; and the massive battle for states' rights in the Nullification Crisis of 1832 all wove a web of frustrations, threatening white Southern stability and progress.[28] No matter that the majority of white Southerners did not own slaves,[29] the institution operated as the South's greatest economic support, creating a slaveocracy that empowered elites.

Preceding secession, though invoking its spirit, John C. Calhoun, a former South Carolina lawmaker serving as John Quincy Adam's vice president, undermined the president's authority on tariff policies by secretly penning *South Carolina Exposition and Protest* in 1828. The document declared the tariff in question unconstitutional.[30] The vice president, among other white Southerners, believed that high tariffs on imports would upset the South's business with foreign markets, while financially privileging northern manufacturers.[31] The South's business with foreign markets rested on the exportation of raw materials—king cotton most of all—with enslaved labour the crop's primary harvester. Calhoun explained:

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25 Ellis & Haney (2007). Visual culture and ideology: The gothic revival in the backlot of antebellum Charleston (p. 11).

26 Ellis & Haney (2007), p. 20.

27 Wilson, Ferris & Adadie (Eds.). (1989). *Encyclopedia of Southern culture* (p. 586).

28 Ellis & Haney (2007), p. 30.

29 While not a majority, University of Virginia research records that it was a substantial minority, totalling 26%: Trammell (2012), p. 90.

30 Tariff of Abominations (1828).

31 Bill of Rights Institute. (n.d.). *John C. Calhoun, South Carolina exposition and protest, 1828.*

> [B]ecause South Carolina from her climate, situation, and peculiar institutions, is, and must ever continue to be, wholly dependent upon agriculture and commerce, not only for her prosperity, but for her very existence as a state –because the valuable products of her soil … are among the very few that can be cultivated with any profit by slave labor—and if by the loss of her foreign commerce, these products should be confined to an inadequate market, the fate of this fertile state would be poverty and utter desolation.[32]

In its dissemination throughout South Carolina, Calhoun lent articulation to the burgeoning rights arguments of states. The dissent remains key to interpreting white Southern identity and its link to states' rights discourse, constitutionalism, the sense of Northern Aggression and secession. Anthony Szczesiul observed that "as political tension increased between the North and the South, residents of Southern states increasingly imagined and defined themselves as 'the South,' as members of a distinct, separate, and superior culture in opposition to the North."[33] He observed that the notion of Southern exceptionalism that emerged out of antebellum anxieties points to the idea that "the South" itself is a myth or fiction.[34]

The Lost Cause Era and Two Johnson Narratives

The Lost Cause narrative became one of the South's most defining myths, rising to religious levels and emboldening generations even through to our current cultural moment. Charles Reagan Wilson observed that while the antebellum period saw a marked rise in regional consciousness, white Southern identity crystallized during the war and reconstruction. He cited the American Civil War as "the crucial event cementing southern white identity. The experience of fighting and losing a war would isolate the region's people."[35] David M. Potter concluded that "The Civil War did far more to produce a southern nationalism which flourished in the cult of the Lost Cause than southern nationalism did to produce the Civil War."[36] Even Edward A. Pollard's title for his famous piece, *The Lost Cause: A*

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32 South Carolina State Library. (2002). *Exposition and protest, reported by the Special Committee of the House of Representatives, on the tariff; read and ordered to be printed Dec. 19th, 1828.*
33 Szczesiul (2019). *The Southern hospitality myth: Ethics, politics, race, and American memory* (p. 12).
34 "[Tara] Mcpherson, [Leigh Ann] Duck, and [Jennifer] Greeson have respectively described the South as 'a fiction,' 'the nation's region,' and an 'internal other,' a site for repressed fears as well as for 'projective fantasies' within the national imaginary": Szczesiul (2019), p. 3.
35 Wilson, Ferris & Adadie (Eds.). (1989), p. 588.
36 Wilson, Ferris & Adadie (Eds.). (1989), p. 588.

New Southern History of the War of the Confederates, alludes to a defeated, grieved mentality grasping for a resurrected sense of meaning despite military and social failure. Pollard attached that meaning to an account specific to the South, contrasting "Southern History" with alternative, implicitly inadequate northern narratives—a mindset solidified with creation of the Virginia Historical Society in 1831 and the Southern Historical Society in 1869.[37] Nash and Stewart explain:

> In short, the Lost Cause mythology provided the white South with a sort of alt-nationalism that cast Confederate generals as gods, white southern women as angels of mercy, southern soldiers as mythic warriors, and enslaved people as loyal servants. To the determined veterans of the conflict, their children, and later generations desperate to believe that their ancestors had not sacrificed hundreds of thousands of young lives to preserve human property, the Lost Cause imposed a harmony on the antebellum South that never existed while exalting those who fought as the true heirs of the founding fathers.[38]

The Lost Cause symbolizes a "Southern flight from reality",[39] a holistic evasion of truth characterized by denial, concealment and erasure arising from defensive, nostalgic memories. General Bradley T. Johnson's *In Memoriam Sempiternam* address, given at the founding celebration for Richmond's Confederate Museum in 1896, embodies Lost Cause mythology. He champions the Confederate cause, contradicts a causal linkage between the war and enslavement, uplifts chivalry, and accents Confederate sentiments with religiosity. He introduces his argument by stating that "our first and most sacred duty is to our holy dead, to ourselves, and to our posterity. It is our highest obligation to satisfy the world of the righteousness of our cause and the sound judgement with which we defended it".[40] Invoking "constitutional liberty" to assert that the South fought for the "liberty" established by "free ancestors" and not for slavery,[41] Johnson links the Confederacy to the American revolutionaries while also erasing black exclusion from said freedoms. Although emphatically denying that the Confederacy fought for black enslavement, he nevertheless cites it as a locus for political power.[42] He assumes the institution's naturalness and biblical foundation, viewing the north's abolitionist leanings as an outcome of enslavement's regional unprofita-

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37 Wilson, Ferris & Adadie (Eds.). (1989), p. 587; Foster, G. M. (1989). Lost cause myth. In *Encyclopedia of Southern culture* (p. 1134).

38 Nash & Stewart (2019). *Southern communities: Identity, conflict, and memory in the American South* (p. 7).

39 Hunter (2014). *The lost cause: The war in Southern myth and memory* (p. 13).

40 Garber (1896). *In memoriam sempiternam* (location 40 – 41).

41 Garber (1896), location 42 – 43.

42 Garber (1896), location 42 – 43.

bility.[43] From Johnson's standpoint, the Confederate battle emerged in defence of the north's unholy efforts to usurp Southern power, assault the South's character of "nobleness", "justice", and "chivalry", and, most searingly, to dismantle the divinely ordained institutions that shaped the Southern way of life.[44] While acknowledging cruelty and injustice in enslavement practices, he views emancipation as "the great crime of the century" and black enfranchisement as its cruellest manifestation. Johnson's assumed white superiority grounds his perspective. He states: "As it is, against the [black man's] will, without his assistance, he has been turned loose in America to do the best he can in the contest with the strongest race that ever lived."[45] He enlists contemporaneous social Darwinist theories to seal his conclusion, prophesying that "the law of the survival of the fittest forces the fight, and the consequence that whenever the colored race, black, red or yellow, has anything the white race want, it takes it, is working … in the face of this irresistible law, the negro, a child of fourteen, has been turned loose to compete with the full grown man of the white race."[46] Johnson's conclusions display the white supremacist principles inherent to the Confederate cause and, thereby, anchored in white Southern identity. The Lost Cause union between grief, white Southern historiography and Christianity flourished from the postbellum period through the New South era and into the early 20th century, with prominent cultural references in the 1915 film, *The Birth of a Nation.*[47] Also becoming Lost Cause exercises were the numerous monuments dedicated to Confederate romanticism, including Richmond's statues to Stonewall Jackson and William Fontaine Maury in 1919 and 1929, respectively. Virginia eventually became home to the most Confederate monuments in the country. As witnessed in 2020, when protests surrounded public Confederate statuary in Richmond, the mythology still shapes white Southern consciousness in ways that radically influence local and national civic life.[48]

William I. Johnson's oral history provides a black narrative juxtaposed to racist, Lost Cause assumptions. Johnson's account of his rise from enslavement

43 Garber (1896), location 42–43.
44 Garber (1896), location 44–47.
45 Garber (1896), location 48–49.
46 Garber (1896), location 48–49.
47 Khalbrae. (2015, 1 August). *The birth of a nation—full movie—(1915) HD—The masterpiece of racist cinema* [Video]. See also Hobbs (2015, 13 December). A hundred years Later, "the birth of a nation" hasn't gone away.
48 Gershon (2022, 5 January). Richmond's Robert E. Lee statue is headed to a black history museum. See also Wilson (2021, 28 June). Revealed: Neo-Confederate group includes military officers and politicians.

symbolizes an inconspicuous strategy achieved through and despite the hegemonic system. In 1840, Johnson was born into enslavement in Albemarle County. He reached Goochland by way of an estate arrangement transferring him as property to the husband of his original enslaver's daughter. He first came to Richmond at the age of 17 as a hired-out butler from the Johnson plantation, although he returned just a year later to serve the Johnsons as a butler into the Civil War. His descriptions of enslaved life include auction house molestations, intentional family separations and the neighbouring plantation's brutal whippings. Johnson's memory contrasts the confederate Johnson's dismissive postulation that Christianity would have ironed out enslavement's harsh qualities.[49] Answering to the injustice, the black Johnson details the calculated manoeuvres among enslaved black people seeking freedom. He describes ways that hired-out help would escape labour arrangements out of protest, undermining their employers' contracts. He names Joe Sutherland, an enslaved coachmen who used reading and writing skills to forge passes that several enslaved persons used for escape to free states.[50] Johnson embarked on his journey to freedom through covert means, running away with four others from his enslaver's service during the war at the advice of Union prisoners to enlist in the Union army. Following General Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox, he returned to the Johnson plantation to reunite with his mother. He recounts Mr Johnson's resigned disposition towards Confederate defeat, noting even his enslaver's sense that "it was what the Lord intended to happen".[51] This reunion marks William I. Johnson's last mention of his enslavers in the narrative, alluding to Clarence Reagan Wilson's observation that "the southern legend of Reconstruction drove a psychological wedge between blacks and whites".[52] Jim Crow limited the forced closeness that the groups experienced in the context of enslavement, instead steering paths towards more separate societies and consciousnesses.

Johnson had made a home in Richmond by 1866, settling into contracting work and opening his own business in the field by 1907. From 1907 to 1932, he became one of the city's leading contractors. Johnson was a member of several fraternal organizations, including the First Baptist Church, the Masons and the Order of St. Luke. His naming of this connection signifies an intentional movement for racial uplift modelled in black communities after emancipation. Civic clubs offered opportunities for racial solidarity and community care amidst still oppressive

49 Garber (1896), location 48–49.

50 Johnson recalls that Sutherland was sold down river to Mississippi as a result of betrayal by his fellow enslaved friend: Virginia Memory. (n.d.). *William I. Johnson, Jr., WPA/VWP life history*.

51 Virginia Memory. (n.d.). *William I. Johnson, Jr., WPA/VWP life history*.

52 Wilson, Ferris & Adadie (Eds.). (1989), p. 589.

circumstances. Johnson's memory characterizes core features of black Southern identity, namely enslavement's formative centrality, subversive activism, piety, kinship ties, collective responsibility and self-determination. He disempowers the concept of black inferiority by demonstrating a black person's ability to activate their gifts through faith and entrepreneurship. William I. Johnson's memory exposes the mythological, white supremacist concepts attached to General Johnson's Lost Cause narrative by showing that black people both willed and assisted their emancipation.

Conclusion

Southern identity developed historically as a reflexive response to racial and economic anxieties. As this angst flared, with moves threatening the institutions of enslavement, colonization and Christianity, a racialized sense of Southern exceptionalism developed. The South concept is linked to the point at which these elements first majorly intersected to catalyze European, later "white", global supremacy. Both white and black Southerners dialogically form identities with memories. The antebellum consciousness shaped white Southern identity, yet wartime memories inspired its crystallization in the Lost Cause era. Oral history illustrates black Southern memory, and its retelling and remembering stimulates a retroactive moulding of group identity. Tracing the two strands establishes the bifurcation that emerged between white Southern and black Southern lives and perceptions of reality—a divergence still impacting the present.

Southern Strategies

Recounting the South's painful history begs the question: how do we respond now? This section examines the work of three black women who address healing from their distinct points. Dr Joy DeGruy's landmark analysis, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome,* demonstrates the necessity of racial healing. While not specific to Southern consciousness, the author's insights hold implications for regional focus. Reverend Dr Paula Parker's genogram work, substantiated and outlined in her book, *Roots Matter: Healing History, Honoring Heritage, and Renewing Hope*, serves as a starting point for people of all ethnic backgrounds to begin facing genealogical truths. Her intentionally black, American approach to this endeavour offers an opportunity to centre a marginalized experience and empowers the community to steer its next stage of emancipation. Dr Carmen Foster's oral history of her family's legacy raises opportunities for reflection on black familial identity in

shaping Southern identity. New black Southern strategies emerge from old black Southern strategies, involving transgression and subversion, revision, restoration, and redemption.

Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome and Generational Healing

Joy DeGruy's development of post-traumatic slave syndrome (PTSS) represents a strategy for intraracial healing that addresses enslavement's holistically traumatic impacts. Her explication seeks to comprehend various patterns within the black community, addressing issues ranging from naming conventions to food customs and relationship behaviours. DeGruy defines PTSS as "a condition that exists when a population has experienced multigenerational trauma resulting from centuries of slavery and continues to experience oppression and institutionalized racism today".[53] A real or imagined notion that social benefits remain inaccessible also marks this syndrome. DeGruy understands enslavement's forced familial destruction as a prime contributing factor to PTSS's pervasiveness, observing that:

> The maintenance of healthy and secure relationships is among the most important values within African culture. What do you think would happen if those relationships were destroyed and never allowed to fully take root again? If you were going to devise a uniquely cruel system of punishment, you could never have devised something more devastating and insidious than American chattel slavery, because it absolutely, categorically destroyed existing relationships and undermined a people's ability to form healthy new ones.[54]

The author theorizes that the relationship between enslaver and enslaved established a broken familial system, replacing the black family's biological patriarch with a white enslaver. The white enslaver's use of violent aggression to control black people then set a default conditioning for violence expressed when those within the community feel a loss of control. DeGruy also targets forced rape, commonly called "slave breeding", as a vicious exercise in relational degradation.[55] Given that tobacco farming depleted the region's land, the Upper South enlisted breeding practices to keep economic growth stimulated and supply growing demands for enslaved labour as American territory expanded westward and into the Deep South.[56] Jack Trammell notes that Richmond led breeding

53 DeGruy (2017). *Post traumatic slave syndrome: America's legacy of enduring injury and healing* (p. 155).
54 DeGruy (2017), p. 100.
55 DeGruy (2017), p. 130.
56 Parker (2016). *Roots matter: Healing history, honoring heritage, renewing hope* (p. 47).

practices during the antebellum period.[57] Ned and Constance Sublette also provide extensive research on the topic, concluding that "Virginia was the mother of slavery", supplying the nation's largest breeding industry.[58] They observed that "the growth of the Southern economy was tied directly to the productivity of the capitalized womb",[59] offering a grim descriptor linked to one of Richmond's most ruthless enslavement practices. Breeding, accompanied by other forms of sexual violence perpetrated against enslaved black women, marks the South's particular expression of decadence and depravity. In stunning candour, the Sublettes raise the question: "Why might white elites want a machine with which to destroy the black family?" They answer: "Most immediately, because the family was the strongest unit of social cohesion and resistance to slavery. But longer term, because destroying family webs systematically in every generation was the best way to guarantee the perpetual existence of an abject underclass whose labor and upkeep would remain as cheap as possible."[60] Their conclusion holds implications not only for the black family, but also for current systemic racism in education, prisons and policing. Trammell and the Sublette's historical findings and assertions affirm DeGruy's social scientific insights because they point to the black family's fracturing as a central concern across disciplines and ethnicities. That multiple sources recognize the problem's origins substantiates the claim of PTSS that a problem exists. Noting research in epigenetics, DeGruy contends that the present generation's lack of direct experience with enslavement fails to fully reconcile persistent trauma.[61]

Healing History, Honouring Heritage and Renewing Hope

Parker's *Roots Matter* work closely intersects with DeGruy's in its focus on healing generational trauma. The idea that genetic coding may transmit environmental influences across generations holds implications for all linked to the institution of slavery. Considering the foundational undergirding that enslavement provided the nation, anyone benefitting from its spoils bears some association, however unconscious. Parker affirms that "multigenerational trauma, plus continued oppression, minus opportunity to access the benefits available in a society leads

57 Trammell (2012), p. 9.
58 Sublette & Sublette (2016), p. 3.
59 Sublette & Sublette (2016), p. 24.
60 Sublette & Sublette (2016), p. 24.
61 DeGruy (2017), p. 101.

to PTSS".[62] She cites enslavement as "a cultural marker, a primal scene and site of memory for African Americans requiring constant reflection and reinterpretation".[63]

In particular, Parker observes that enslavement and its horrors continue to haunt the black community holistically. She locates its memory within the scope of cultural trauma, which references a loss of meaning and identity so overwhelming that it damages social cohesion.[64] Recalling womanist identity and the topic's persistent need for examination, Parker names black family separation and sale as "the most devastating trauma the 'American born' enslaved people endured".[65] Cultivating resilience becomes a key strategy in her healing schema, with intentional remembrance, preserved kinship ties and hopeful belief being prime markers.[66] Parker highlights religion, "slave religion" specifically, as a springboard for black, Christian-based healing broadly, explaining that "when enslaved persons yelled, called out, bawled, shrieked, bellowed, and screamed, they proclaimed, announced, and asserted their existence from the core of their being".[67]

Roots Matter culminates with the presentation of a six-week course, based in the Black Church context, that seeks to cultivate generational healing. Dr Parker bases this effort on genogram development, healing prayer practices, biblical and historical studies, and resilience testimony and exercises. The genogram's particular strength in assessing transgenerational traumas and gifts provides an opportunity for lay psychoanalysis. That Richmond remains Dr Parker's home base is a gift to a Southern community that is distinct in its transmission of enslavement's trauma, and still hopeful through its resilience and established familial ties.

62 Parker (2016), p. 50.
63 Parker (2016), p. 10.
64 Parker (2016), p. 7.
65 Parker (2016), p. 47.
66 Parker (2016), p. 51.
67 Parker (2016), p. 61.

The Ties That Bind: The Foster Legacy, Black Resilience and the Southern Sense of Place

Studying an old black Richmond family enables an examination of the kinship ties that shape black Southern resilience strategies.[68] Richmond's old history, formed with Virginia's legacy as a backdrop, moulds black Richmond's relationality. Naming certain streets, neighbourhoods, churches and high schools aids memory, telling an old Richmonder most of what one might hesitate to ask for fear of not "minding your business". Dr Carmen Foster's family memories weave a story of black determination amidst enslavement and Jim Crow's injustices. The Foster legacy embodies a black Southern narrative connecting identity, communal character and a regional identification with place.

Dr Foster traces her familial ties to Richmond across almost 200 years, with her paternal lines stretching west through Louisa County and east to Mathews County into the antebellum period. Her great grandfather, Jack Foster, served as an enslaved manservant before the Civil War to Colonel Christopher Quarles Tompkins, whose roots connect to Poplar Grove Plantation. While knowing this past, Foster expresses little to no attachment to it. When asked her family's sense of the Civil War, she says:

> No one really talked about it specifically, but we knew we were associated with white folks that owned us. We knew who they were … Those were just the times in which folks lived. One thing that's interesting, is that black families and white families intertwined with each other even though they understood the legal aspects of segregation … They were in each other's private spaces.[69]

While Civil War history rises to obsessive levels in Virginia, Dr Foster rather focuses on black community empowerment efforts following the crisis. She recalls that "as the Civil War ended, there's always been this sense of self-determination and this sense of achieving against the odds that's always been a part of the family value system".[70] She holds familial ties to Jackson Ward, a historically African-American district in Richmond and a once prosperous black enclave, starting with her grandparent's move to the neighbourhood in the 1920s—a timing placing the family amidst Richmond's own black Southern renaissance. Foster notes the self-help societies and fraternal orders active in Southern towns at the time,

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68 "Community is much more than a feeling. It is the ties that bind, imagined and real, for better and for worse; it is the web of personal relationships that links disparate people together and gives meaning to their interactions." Nash & Stewart (2019), p. 3.

69 Dr Carmen Foster, Interview by Jabriel M. Hasan, Richmond, 25 March 2022.

70 Dr Carmen Foster, Interview by Jabriel M. Hasan, Richmond, 25 March 2022.

which channelled black people's self-derived will to succeed and responded to society's aggressive stance of black exclusion enacted through contemporaneous movements such as Jim Crow and eugenics.

Foster recalls a story of her grandfather, Christopher Foster, organizing the Astoria Beneficial Club out of her great-grandmother's parlour.[71] Her grandfather, who grew up as child seeing the city's Confederate monuments being erected, threw a party where guests dressed as prominent figures such as the Vanderbilts. She remarks that "people still knew how to make their own fun … They were all striving—particularly as Jim Crow started squeezing and squeezing."[72] The move also points to the tactic of emulation as resistance. In a hegemonic culture that treated black people as lesser human beings, Christopher Foster dared to imitate a Vanderbilt—humorously. When I suggested this interpretation to Dr Foster, she replied:

> The white supremacist systems may consider black people inferior, but all that did was create the opportunity for black people and their families to demonstrate their quality and their competency and their value—not to white people, but to their God, because they knew that they were children of God. So, in some ways, what oppression meant as bad, it's interesting to see how generations before me have used oppression as grist for the mill to make us better and not bitter, and to strive to achieve for the good of the race…Everything back then was [about] uplifting the race, which is a collectivist perspective that was part of what had been passed to them from their roots of enslavement about how we look out for each other and take care of each other.[73]

Mr Foster's move alludes to the shape-shifting that American society acculturates black people to practice to thrive in colonial systems. While assimilating, that assimilation can also communicate a triumph against the odds.

Dr Foster's cousin, Alice Jackson Stuart, also resisted racism in bold measure through the academic arena. After earning her bachelor's degree from Hartshorn Memorial College, which later merged into Virginia Union University, she decided to transfer her graduate study from Smith College to a school closer to her Richmond family. She became the first black person to apply to the University of Virginia's graduate school. The institution denied her application based on race and "for other good and sufficient reasons not necessary to be …

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71 *Richmond Planet* archives include references to Mr Foster and the Astoria Beneficial Club. The club's activities received notoriety in the *Planet*'s society columns. See NewspaperArchive. (n.d.). Astoria's beneficial club. *Richmond Planet*, 4 January 1930 (p. 2). See also NewspaperArchive. (n.d.). Claremont. *Richmond Planet*, 12 July 1924 (p. 4).

72 Dr Carmen Foster, Interview by Jabriel M. Hasan, Richmond, 25 March 2022.

73 Dr Carmen Foster, Interview by Jabriel M. Hasan, Richmond, 25 March 2022.

enumerated".[74] Writing from Frederick Douglass Court[75] to the university's rector and board of visitors, Ms Stuart replied:

> I herewith respectfully call you to specify the "other good and sufficient reasons" why you rejected my application … At all events, I wish to know in full the reasons why my application was rejected. So far as rejecting my application because I am Negro is concerned, I will discuss that further with you when you have itemized the "good and sufficient reasons" upon which it was rejected.[76]

Receiving a response from the rector reiterating the school's original position,[77] Stuart remained determined to know those reasons. She threatened to sue the State of Virginia. The state, seeking to avoid a lawsuit, instead passed the Dovell Act, which provided black students fully funded tuition to attend out-of-state graduate institutions and created a graduate programme at Virginia State College for Negroes (now Virginia State University). Stuart used this offer to earn her master's degree in English from Columbia University in 1937.[78] Following her death in 2001, the Senate of Virginia issued a Joint Resolution honouring her courageous efforts to expand higher education opportunities for black people.[79] In 2012, she became a Virginia Women in History honouree.[80] Her groundbreaking defiance demonstrates an exceptional witness to a black Richmond woman's resilience and commitment to achieve. Exemplifying Dr Foster's quote, Stuart

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74 Encyclopedia Virginia. (n.d.). *Letter from Alice Jackson to the university rector and board of visitors.*

75 Frederick Douglass Court was created by Maggie Walker's University Realty Group as a suburb for Richmond's black middle class. Near to Virginia Union University, and with streets named after W.E.B. DuBois and John Mercer Langston, the enclave assigned black people prestige. Selden Richardson comments, "Frederick Douglass Court carried a certain cachet at that time among those blacks who [saw themselves as] sophisticated and fashionable." He remarks that, "This is the second generation after Reconstruction." (Reference: Kollatz (2017, 22 March). Suburban dreams.) That Stuart's family resided in this neighbourhood suggests an affiliation with a brand of Richmond-oriented black excellence, the instrumentalization of which inspired a daring to challenge one of the state's oldest, highest ranked and most traditional academic institutions.

76 Encyclopedia Virginia. (n.d.). *Letter from Alice Jackson to the university rector and board of visitors.*

77 University of Virginia Library. (n.d.). Typed letter from rector to Alice Jackson, 3 Oct 1935. *Women at the University of Virginia: Breaking and making tradition* [Exhibition webpage].

78 University of Virginia Library. (n.d.). *Women at the University of Virginia: Breaking and making tradition* [Exhibition webpage].

79 University of Virginia Library. (n.d.). Virginia Senate joint resolution No. 40 in honor of Alice Jackson Stuart. 10 July 2001. *Women at the University of Virginia: Breaking and making tradition* [Exhibition webpage].

80 Virginia Changemakers. (n.d.). *Alice Jackson Stuart (1913–2001).*

instrumentalized Virginia's oppressive tactics for her own long-term advantage, subverting the hegemonic system.

Dr Foster's conclusions on contemporary Southern healing tasks also maintain a subversive quality. Speaking as a womanist and educational leader, she assigns the family and its children a primary position. "One thing is paramount: the black community has a responsibility to ensure that the children of the next generation know and understand the history at a macro and micro level, because if they don't there will be no one there to pass it on."[81] At that micro level, she laments that "Richmond has made it uncomfortable for many people to stay here who are African American. There are fewer and fewer natives to recount the history and share it to the next generation of newcomers that may have no context or are not interested—or are oblivious (that's black or white)."[82] Concerning tasks for other racial groups, she asserts the need for white people to gain overdue awareness and, finally, for all people to unite in dialogue for shared understanding.[83] When asked how Southerners may develop a new New South, her response captures the dissonance between white and black concepts of the South:

> I think that there's a fallacy that there is a "New South". I'm going to challenge that assumption, because the South repeats itself … I think the South shows up in the 20th century as Charlottesville 2017. I think the South shows up in the ridiculous circus of Ketanji Brown Jackson's senate hearings for the Supreme Court. I think the South shows up in terms of not wanting to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment after decades. I think the South shows up in terms of the ways that Mississippi is still at the bottom in terms of education. I think the South shows up in resistance to voting rights. Until the South can rectify that, it will never be the New South, no matter how hard we wish it to be. At the same time, I am a proud Southerner. I want to see the South become not the New South, but a reformed South and repentant South, and a resurrected South that affirms that—not all men are created, but all humans

81 Dr Carmen Foster, Interview by Jabriel M. Hasan, Richmond, 25 March 2022.

82 Dr Carmen Foster, Interview by Jabriel M. Hasan, Richmond, 25 March 2022.

83 Dr Foster's comments connect to Resmaa Menakem's call for the black community to work within to uplift itself. While he argues that the inevitable mass triggering that would ensue inhibits black people and white people from working together on a large scale, he maintains that "Because black Americans, white Americans, and police have each developed their own subcultures, each group first needs to create profound change *within* its own culture. This means that each group needs to develop its own new stories, symbols, rituals, role models, elders, and so on. This is especially important for us as African Americans. We need to be solely in charge of our own cultural shifts. Otherwise we run the risk of being co-opted yet again by the pervasive (and often subtle) influences of white-body supremacy." Menakem (2017). *My Grandmother's hands: Healing racial trauma in our minds and bodies* (p. 248).

> are created equal … Ed Ayers talks about the promise of the New South. The New South is hope fulfilled. That's when we'll have a New South.[84]

After identifying a list of injustices on the region's record, Dr Foster's description of herself as a proud Southerner elicits the question, "Why?" Her reply: "Because I am proud of my ancestors, both enslaved and free, who have lived in Kentucky and Virginia for generations." Her words display the Southern sense of place, which Steven E. Nash and Bruce E. Stewart describe as a central and vital component of Southern identity across racial categories. They note historian David Mathews' observation that, "Southerners have a unique sense of time and place, of belonging, of community… Southerners have roots. They have an identity. A southerner—whatever [their] station, whatever [their] color—has a 'home'."[85] Dr Foster's naming ancestral connections to land as a mark of Southern pride emphasizes an embedded regional understanding that the land forms the people who shape the culture, and vice versa. Dr Foster's comment denotes rootedness as a strategy. Through rootedness, Southerners may find the healing wisdom of context, kinship and belonging.

Conclusion

The strategies that DeGruy, Parker and Foster offer invite black Southerners to grapple with the region's troubling history while not being overcome by the jarring task. Degruy's analysis summarizes enslavement's traumatic impact on the black community. Engaging this trauma, Parker develops healing practices that centre self-exploration, using the family lineage as a conduit. Examining the deficits and strengths we transmit and transmute through our family lines offers both a sobering and hopeful impetus for further exploration. Foster's expertise in conveying local and familial legacies through oral narrative provides the wisdom and perspective of eldership, along with the charge to stay rooted in the purpose-inspiring power of place. Focusing on the place that forms kinship ties and their surrounding culture equips Southern strategists with contextual knowledge for the ongoing witness to black tenacity. In all, black responses to Southern healing require that we maintain hope, courage and determination as we come to understand the complex influences associated with regional history.

84 Dr Carmen Foster, Interview by Jabriel M. Hasan, Richmond, 25 March 2022.
85 Nash & Stewart (2019), p. 2.

Conclusion

Richmond's healing will rise from bodily fluids and tobacco dust; from prayers, chants and incantations over river water; from ghosts ascending from humid, sun-drenched streets at July 4th protests; from the young folks marching off of university quads—all committed to knowing everything and telling everybody—visiting coffee hours and front porches to meet elders who rest in dignity knowing that they know very little, and yet enough.

The Galilean Mystic said, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."[86] Yet, truth remains our most bitter potion. However, without it, inevitably, no strategy devised will succeed. In a territory covered in battlefields, the knight archetype may serve us well, offering a familiar reference for the courage necessary to risk losing ourselves to find our identities again. The knights we may place on our pedestals today rocked our baby bodies. They marched, bled and died for us; they taught us and preached for us; and they survived for us. The memories with which we tremble never leave, but efforts to reconcile them stand to make us better.

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86 John 8:32, King James Version.

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