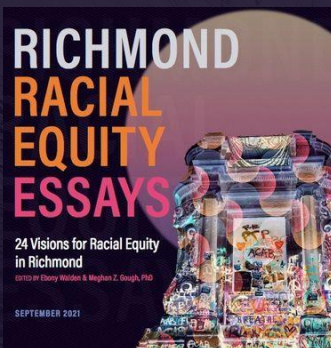


# Richmond Racial Equity Essays

Dismantling Racism. Reimagining Richmond.



A multi-media project focused on racial equity in Richmond  
Essays. Videos. Podcast

# The Vision

**What is your vision for a  
racially equitable Richmond?**

**How do we get there?**

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## The Curators



Ebony Walden



Dr. Meghan Gough



Duron Chavis

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## The Vision

- **Purpose:** Promote public dialogue, thought leadership and collective action.
- Leaders with a **broad spectrum** of expertise, identities, sectors, experience.
- **Solutions and strategies** grounded in personal stories, history, data and experience.

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## Essay Topics

- Planning for Inclusive Communities
- Affordable Housing
- Educational Equity
- Economic Empowerment
- Power Shifting & Partnerships
- Latino Leadership & Language Access
- Community, Healing & Justice
- Building Healthy Communities

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### BLACK AND BROWN CENTERED PLACEMAKING ROOTED IN IDENTITY...

By Ebony Walden

*Black and Brown Centered Placemaking Rooted in Identity & Ownership*

As a Black woman who grew up in New York and has now lived in Virginia for 18 years, I've seen racial differences written into every landscape of my life for as long as I can remember. I began to notice these differences when I was around 8 years old. As I rode through my working-class Black and Latino community in Hempstead, NY into Garden City or Rockville Center, white communities directly north and south respectively, everything changed. The corner stores, liquor stores and modest homes transitioned into larger homes with bigger lawns, better shopping and better schools; better



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## EXPANDING THE GEOGRAPHY OF OPPORTUNITY AND OWNERSHIP

By Maritza E. Mercado Pechin, AICP

**A racially equitable Richmond is a city that makes my dad feel comfortable and welcome.**

I grew up as the only child of my single-mother, Lydia Mercado. I had a complicated relationship with my biological father, Dimiter Gorchev, who was 23 years older than my mother. Dimiter struggled to connect with me, his Puerto Rican daughter who grew up in the 1980s/90s in San Juan, Puerto Rico and Newton, Massachusetts. Dimiter grew up in Sophia, Bulgaria in the 1930s/40s. He served time in a Stalin work camp, and orchestrated our family's dramatic escape from communism, which even included hidden compartments in car floors.



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## PEACE FOR COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

By Lea Whitehurst-Gibson and Bekah Kendrick

**Peace for Communities of Color:** *A conversation between a Black woman and a white woman on Shifting Power and the need for Radical Imagination in the nonprofit sector.*

An equitable Richmond would be a place where **leaders of color have access to the resources we need to protect the people we love and build thriving communities according to our own vision** -- without adopting oppressive norms that exhaust, harm, and undermine our work. An equitable Richmond would be a place where people of color have freedom **to reimagine a new way of being**, one that works for all people regardless of race or identity.





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## THE CASE FOR MEANINGFUL LANGUAGE ACCESS

By Tanya M. González, M.P.A.

Through my work in the Richmond area for the last twenty years, I have dedicated my career to welcoming immigrant families, starting at Refugee and Immigration Services, then through the City of Richmond Office of Multicultural Affairs, and for the last five years, through Sacred Heart Center, where we connect Latino families with tools to thrive and flourish. I have seen first-hand the growth of the immigrant community in the Richmond area, and have been an integral part of the services in place intended to assist families in their adjustment to their new home. My key point that I am sharing is simply this: **the Richmond metropolitan area needs a comprehensive immigration integration policy that centers language access services and that is implemented by localities, nonprofits, and other human service providers to begin to move towards racial equity for immigrant families.** This essay presents a case through the lens of



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## INCARCERATION AND VIOLENCE: TIME FOR A CHANGE

By Rev. Ashley Diaz Mejias

**Prison Isn't Working**

In her book detailing the work of Common Ground, a New York-based incarceration alternative to violent crime convictions, Danielle Sered writes that there are four core drivers of violence -- shame, isolation, exposure to violence, and a diminished ability to meet one's economic needs. Simultaneously, there are four key features of prison and the ways that the prison industrial complex strains Black and Brown communities: shame, isolation, exposure to violence, and a diminished ability to meet one's economic needs. Sered writes, "As a nation, we have developed a response to violence that is characterized by precisely what we know to be the main



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## SPACES TO BREATHE

By Ryan Rinn

Close your eyes and take a deep breath. Think back to the last time you were outside under the shade of a tree enjoying the breeze, the chirping birds, and the fresh air. Did your shoulders drop? Did some tension leave your body? Did you feel refreshed?

If you were like me, and many in the Richmond region, you spent a good amount of time in public parks during last year's pandemic. During the 2020 calendar year, Richmond Parks saw an all-time record proving that our parks are a treasure for the public good. They're free places to experience nature, relax, recharge, meditate, exercise and enjoy the company of friends and neighbors. They're places to just be, spaces to breathe. In an equitable city, green spaces should be accessible to everyone.



# From Essays to Action

- + Personal Transformation
- + Institutional Change
- + Reallocating Resources
- + Policy Change
- + Multi-Sector Collective Action