

The Center for Design Engagement

a community proposal for

# SHOCKOE BOTTOM MEMORIAL PARK

AUGUST 2017



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# SHOCKOE BOTTOM MEMORIAL PARK



AUGUST 2017

**A REPORT AND DESIGN PROPOSAL**

Prepared by

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"It is holy ground, not only to the descendants of those who are buried there, but to every American everywhere. Black, white, Latino or otherwise, we all stand on those shallow and unmarked graves. The people laid to rest there laid the cornerstones of this country with their bare hands. We prosper on the foundations they laid. Our freedom wrests, in no small part, on the freedom they were denied.

We owe them a debt we can never repay. We can, though, remember. We must choose to do so.

If we can't tell that story in Richmond, the seat of so much of the history we share, we betray the debt we owe to our forebears and devalue the inheritance we leave to our children. This is an essential part of our national journey, our struggle to be free."

Bob Deans  
Author of *The River Where America Began*

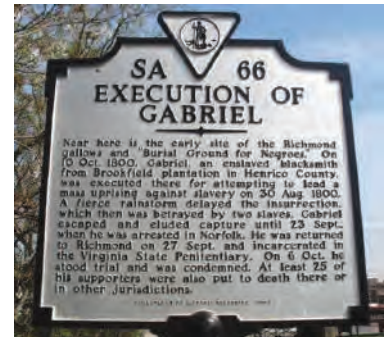


# 01

## INTRODUCTION

The Center for Design Engagement ([designengagement.org](http://designengagement.org)), a non-profit organization affiliated with the University of Massachusetts Amherst and dedicated to involving the full range of the public in design decisions, was invited by the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project to spend a week in Richmond, May 29 to June 4, 2016 conducting community meetings, meeting with local advocates, making presentations at area high schools and building on the ongoing community work, produce a design proposal for a Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park. The designs in this report are the product of that week and ongoing design development based on advice of community leaders in a series of meetings in 2017.

We are pleased to present this proposal for the community's consideration. Our goal is to spur further discussion and, we hope, a consensus that a more expansive Shockoe Bottom landscape is necessary for securing this place as a site of conscience, a sacred site, and a place for building a more equitable Richmond. Our highest hope is that we can advance the conversation that will eventually lead to a Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park, a place where Richmonders and all affected people can make fully visible what has for too long been made invisible.



CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT: CEREMONIAL OFFERINGS AT THE EDGE OF THE AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND SITE; SHOCKOE BOTTOM IN THE 19TH CENTURY; GABRIEL, WHO LED A REBELLION AGAINST SLAVERY IN 1800, WAS HUNG IN SHOCKOE BOTTOM; THE TUNNEL UNDER BROAD STREET LEADING TO THE AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND; A SLAVE AUCTION HOUSE IN SHOCKOE BOTTOM BEFORE ITS DEMOLITION AFTER THE CIVIL WAR.



## WHY SHOCKOE BOTTOM MATTERS

Shockoe Bottom matters because the exchange in human beings that took place there, the exploitation of those bodies, their torture and murder, their treatment as commodities like cotton and tobacco, was unprecedented in its scale in the United States. Only New Orleans had a larger slave-trading district. Richmond, however, was the epicenter of the trade. Richmond's unique role was as the wholesale center, the supplier of enslaved human beings to the rest of the labor-hungry South.

Shockoe Bottom matters because the work and wealth produced by the enslaved people who were forced to pass through Shockoe Bottom built Richmond, Virginia, and the United States.

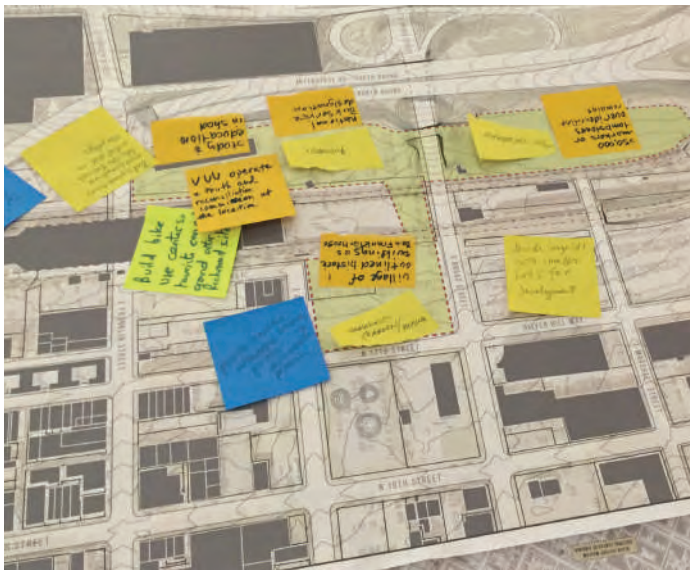
It matters because nowhere else is the contradiction between the American ideal of personal freedom and the reality of American slavery seen as powerfully as in the one square mile of downtown Richmond's Shockoe Bottom. Here, ideals of freedom were proclaimed by Patrick Henry in St. John's Church and built in stone at Thomas Jefferson's Virginia State Capitol. Both Henry and Jefferson, of course, were slave owners. And here a Confederacy would house its leaders and marshal its forces in defense of that profitable system of human exploitation. And here as well a young man named Gabriel, a man with ideas, skill, and eloquence, would give his life in an attempt to lead a rebellion to overturn the system of slavery.

Shockoe Bottom matters because honoring enslaved people's graves is a basic duty that we have failed to carry out.

It matters because the landscape of slavery in Shockoe Bottom was literally buried and to a degree - although not entirely - forgotten. And it was buried and forgotten in a city that invented and demanded veneration for a rewriting of the history of the Civil War - the painstakingly constructed mythology of the "Lost Cause."



## THE DESIGN CHARRETTE



Important to acknowledge the profits that were made off of those who were enslaved... and how that contributes to Richmond's current economy. (connect history to economy)

OVER A HUNDRED PEOPLE GATHERED FOR TWO COMMUNITY MEETINGS ON MAY 30 AND JUNE 1 TO DISCUSS IDEAS FOR THE MEMORIAL PARK.

The Center for Design Engagement (CD\*E) team began its work with a statement made by Ana Edwards, Chair of the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project, in the now-open field of the African Burial Ground: “We have a right to know. And now that we know, what do we do, and how do we do it?” We also take as a baseline assumption – one that some might question – that Richmond has been changing rapidly, with a population increasingly ready to confront and wrestle with Richmond’s history, not piecemeal, but wholeheartedly, and, indeed, with an open heart.

CD\*E, composed of architecture and history faculty and students from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, was asked to envision what a Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park could look like and do for the city of Richmond. We did not land in Richmond with preconceived ideas, nor a sense that we were here to reinvent the wheel. Indeed, we came with great humility, recognizing the enormity of the task as well as the voluminous efforts made by Richmonders over the past decades to bring to light the history of Shockoe Bottom. We read, we visited, and we learned – from previous reports, from conversations, and from past community engagement efforts.

We developed our proposal from a foundation of community ideas developed over the past year and captured in a community report of August 2015 in a process led by the Sacred Ground Project. Richmonders overwhelmingly believe that Shockoe Bottom must be remembered with a much larger landscape than simply the Lumpkin’s Jail. This was the overwhelming sentiment expressed in the Sacred Ground process, a later community engagement process led by the city administration and in our own week-long process in June 2016. That said, our design charrette proceeded on the assumption that the Lumpkin’s Jail project was moving forward but could easily be incorporated into a larger Memorial Park. There was also a consistent belief that the area of the African Burial Ground is sacred space and should be treated differently than other parts of the site, as a place of reverence and respect. Finally, we were urged to embrace economic development in Shockoe Bottom and to suggest ways to make it more equitable and sustainable.

Over the course of the week we held two community meetings attended by more than 100 people. We also spoke with a dozen key individuals, and made presentations at two Richmond high schools (Richmond Community High, and Huguenot High School, where students shared their creative ideas for remembering Shockoe Bottom. We asked each group to consider three questions:

**How should we remember what happened in Shockoe Bottom?**

01

**What other activities beyond marking and memorializing should take place in this memorial park?**

02

**How might we encourage economic development that brings true and long-lasting benefits to Richmonders, especially its African-American community?**

03

CDE faculty and students returned to Richmond regularly in the year following the release of the first report, taking in further advice from community leaders. This updated report includes designs that synthesize dozens of specific suggestions from conversations with many stakeholders.





VIEW AT MEMORIAL PARK

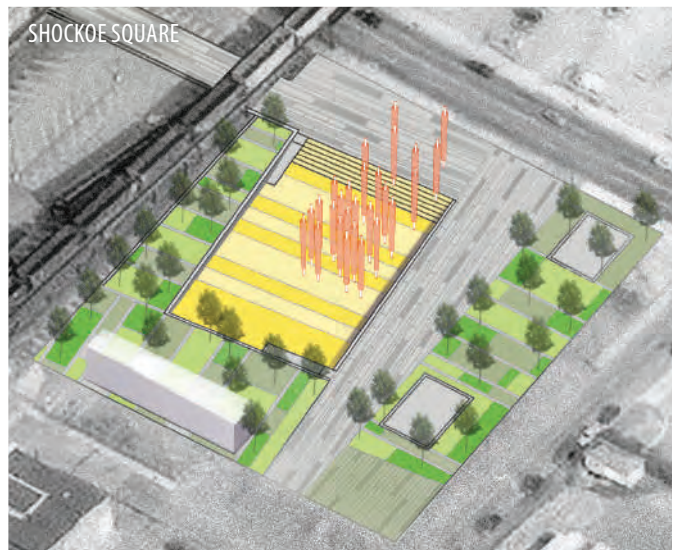
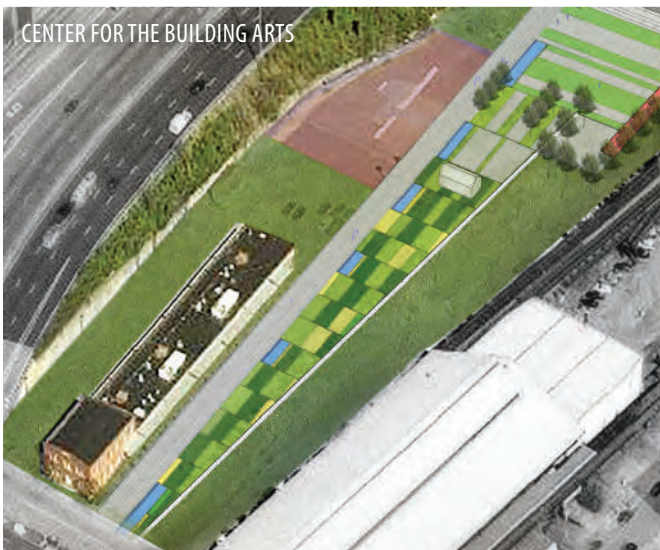


# 02

## DESIGN PROPOSAL

The elements of our design proposal emerged out of the many insights provided by the community meetings. Those insights, which we captured in dozens of pages of notes, were wide ranging, and included both specific recommendations as well as ideas about the emotional and symbolic meanings the group hoped the site would convey. This updated report attempts to capture the requests and insights of community members we have met with over the past year

The discussion was passionate and productively heated, as interracial groups debated how best to honor the enslaved peoples, tell their history, and also make Shockoe Bottom a vibrant economic resource for the city. Remarkably, we found a broad agreement on the core elements for the memorial park: a strong design feature to grab the attention of the public; a new gathering place—a public square—for the community; a symbolic recovering of the Shockoe Creek; a clearly demarcated place for reverence and reflection; lasting investments in the education and advancement of Richmond’s African-American residents. Every element of our design proposal derives from the ideas presented in these and past community conversations.



## AREAS OF FOCUS







## AERIAL VIEW

- |  |           |                              |           |                                     |           |
|--|-----------|------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| Reconciliation Triangle                            | <b>01</b> | Winfree Cottage              | <b>05</b> | Interactive Interpretive Wall       | <b>09</b> |
| Center for Building Arts & Sustainable Development | <b>02</b> | African Burial Ground Site   | <b>06</b> | Shockoe Square                      | <b>10</b> |
| Lumpkin's Jail Site / Devil's Half Acre            | <b>03</b> | Gabriel's Way                | <b>07</b> | Grove of Light                      | <b>11</b> |
| Urban Gardens                                      | <b>04</b> | Richmond Main Street Station | <b>08</b> | Footprints of Slave Trade Buildings | <b>12</b> |





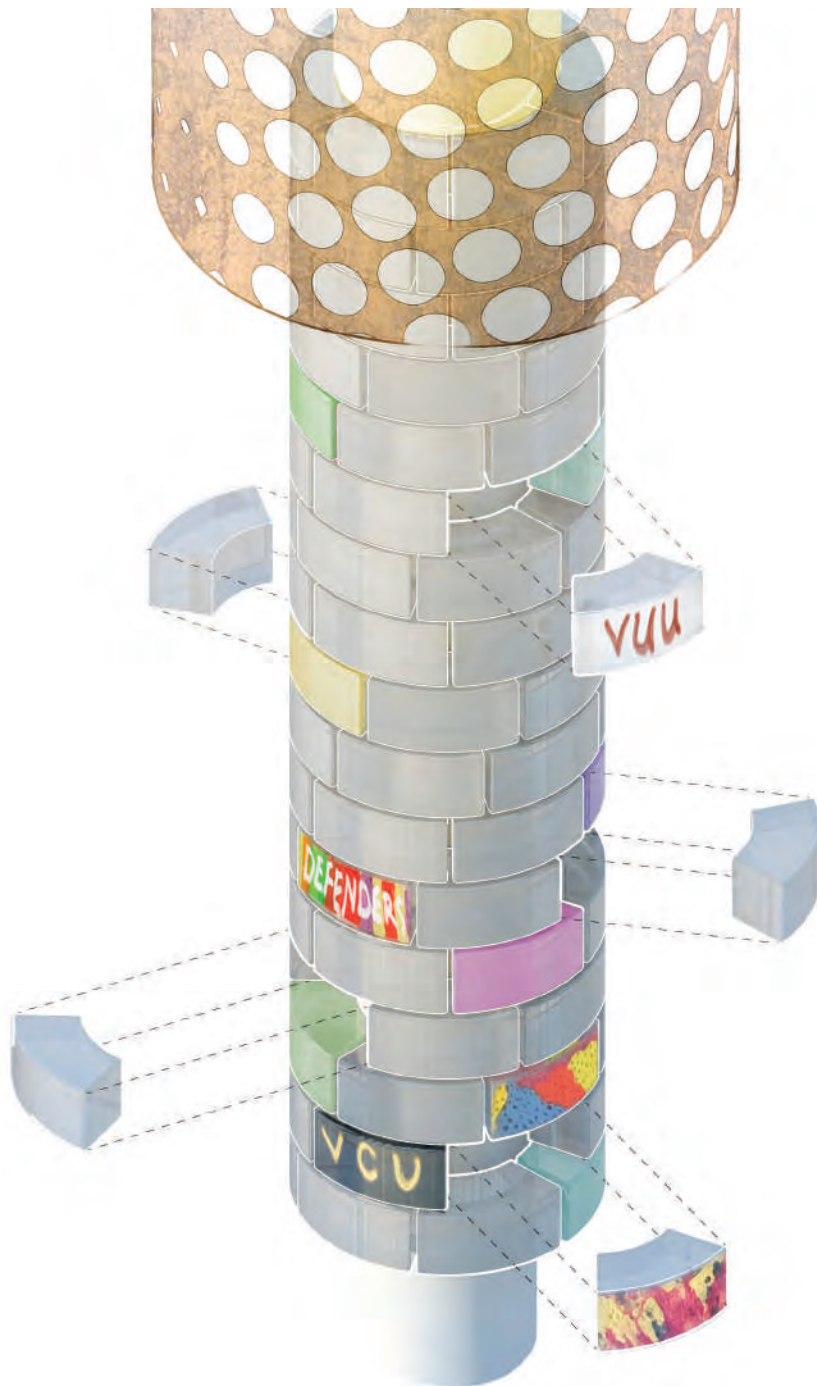


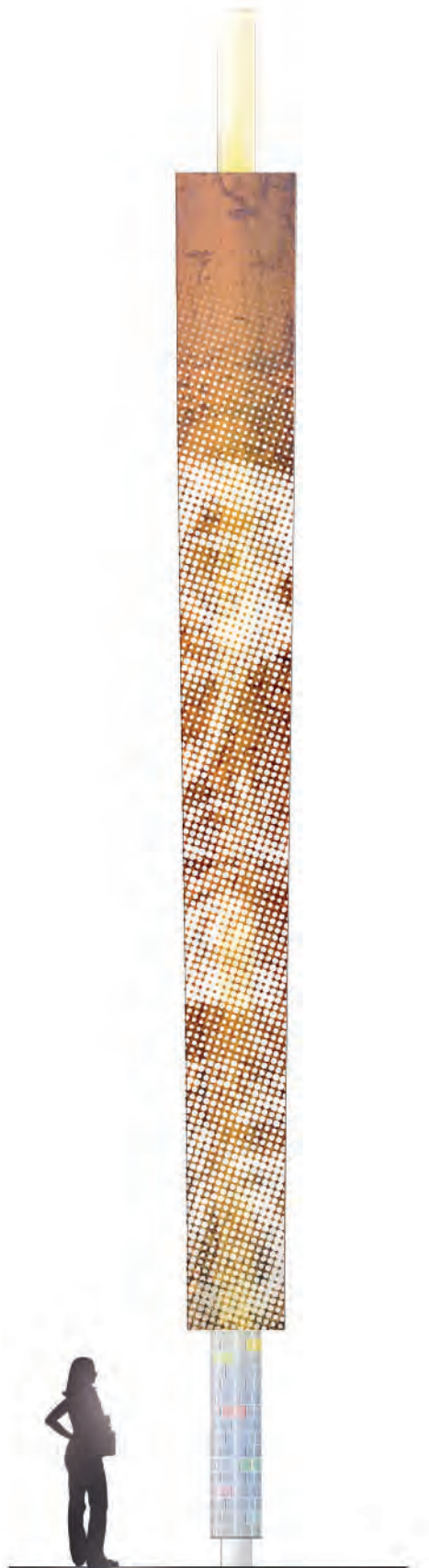


## SHOCKOE SQUARE

A new gathering place, Shockoe Square, is where Richmonders and people from far and wide can gather together to consider the legacy of slavery and its long shadow.

Shockoe Square would be the new gateway into the Shockoe Bottom memorial sites - Lumpkin's Jail (referred to by the era's Black residents as "Devil's Half Acre," for the brutality of the place) and the African Burial Ground - and would be the place where visitors and Richmonders can gather to start their explorations of the history of Shockoe Bottom, to begin walking tours, to hear music and drama performances, view outdoor films, and to learn of public art projects and other historic landmarking efforts around the city. As important as Shockoe Bottom is, the trade in human beings shaped virtually every area of the city; we hope the Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park will be seen and experienced as the center of a citywide effort to re-present Richmond's past.





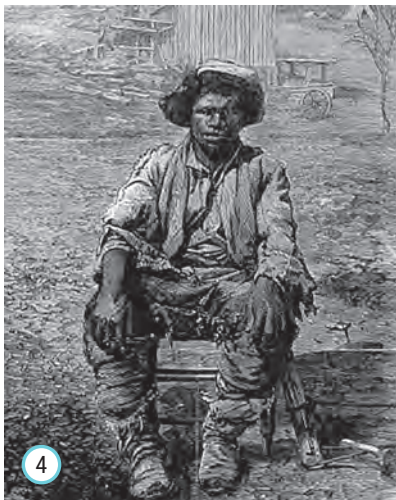
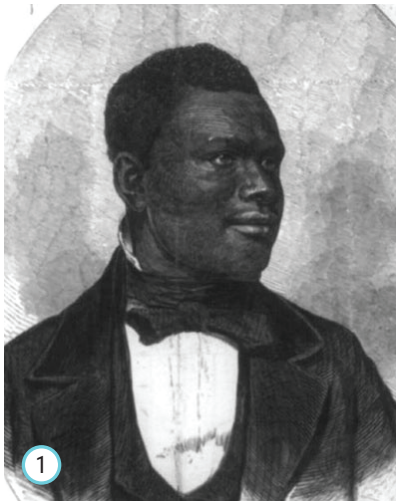
## RE-ENVISIONING THE MODERN MONUMENT

We have marked this square with a Grove of Light, designed to make Shockoe Bottom visible up and down Broad Street, from the Amtrak trains, and from I-95, over which some 100,00 vehicles pass every day. We hope that in the future when people speak of Richmond they will speak of the Grove of Light at Shockoe Bottom before they speak of Monument Avenue, where the valorization of the Confederacy has long dominated the image of the city. Part of the response to the divisive history and present of Monument Avenue would be to draw the focus away from the Confederate and Lost Cause revisionism, toward a new landmark at the site of Richmond's most important untold story.

The Grove of Light consists of a series of columns. Each column has a lower level consisting of curved glazed rings making up the "bark" of the "trees." These rings would be produced through a community process that would encourage the city's key organizations and institutions to help create the foundation for these columns.

The rest of each column would be a tower of light, encircled by a metal screen. Each screen would be perforated in a way to create a pixelated image of an important figure in Richmond's history, the figures who have long been left out of the main narratives of the city's past. From close up it would be an abstract canvas of cut openings of different sizes. But from a distance – say, from the train, or from the top of Church Hill, or from City Hall – the images of key figures in Richmond's history who have too often been ignored would come into focus.

We imagine a community engagement process to determine which figures would be portrayed. The screens would be designed to be removed and replaced, so that there could be a rotation of significant figures on display, and new ones added over time. This is intended as a living landmark, precisely in contrast to the fixed marble monuments that dot the city.



**1 ANTHONY BURNS / 2 ELIZABETH VAN LEW / 3 VIRGINIA CIVIL RIGHTS COALITION (1981) / 4 GABRIEL / 5 UNITED STATES COLORED TROOPS**

IMAGERY OF INDIVIDUALS WHO HOLD PARTICULAR SIGNIFICANCE TO THE HISTORY AND STORY OF SLAVERY IN RICHMOND WOULD BE USED AS INSPIRATION FOR THE PERFORATED SCREENING ON EACH COLUMN





IMAGERY OF GABRIEL



HALFTONE ABSTRACTION OF IMAGERY





EXISTING VIEW  
BETWEEN RAIL LINES



PROPOSED VIEW  
BETWEEN RAIL LINES

## INTERPRETATION

A digital interpretive wall, that will offer a compelling, flexible platform for honoring and reflecting on the memory of enslaved people, their pain, their resistance, and their resilience will connect Shockoe Square to the African Burial Ground and the area of Lumpkins Jail.

The interactive wall would offer a history of the site, images of the development of Shockoe Bottom, and would be a vehicle by which we can display the list of names of enslaved people captured in the remarkable *Unknown No Longer* project of the Virginia Historical Society. The wall would also be able to be transformed – perhaps nightly or for anniversary events – into a screen for artists to present their work.





EXISTING VIEW FROM  
E. BROAD STREET



PROPOSED VIEW FROM  
E. BROAD STREET

## MEMORIALIZATION

We propose a memorial landscape centered around the African Burial Ground. For many people who come to know Shockoe Bottom, walking on the fields that once served as the African Burial Ground and which, still, somewhere beneath the ground, hold the remains of free as well as enslaved men and women, is the emotional culmination of a visit to the site. We aim to create a landscape that offers respect to the dead and an opportunity for the living to reflect on and honor their lives.

Many people over the years have expressed their desire to make, at least symbolically, the Shockoe Creek visible. It is around this creek that the first Indian settlements were established millennia ago, and around which the modern city was begun. We have designed a waterway that would lead from the community farm we are proposing (see below) into the African Burial Ground. Small bridges over the waterway would mark a transition into the most sacred precinct, adjacent to the area on which scholars believe the burial ground stood. We have named the pathway alongside the waterway in the African Burial Ground area Gabriel's Way. It leads to a place reserved for a changing work of public art in honor of Gabriel, who was publically executed on this site for his efforts to overthrow slavery in Virginia.

In response to the passionate call we heard repeatedly for capturing the vast scale of enslaved people who passed through Shockoe Bottom – to be sold, to be hired out to work, some to achieve freedom – we will place a hundred thousand small rocks along the waterway. We expect there to be interpretive elements added throughout this memorial landscape, so that in small encounters, we might bring to life the history of slavery, resistance, and resilience in Shockoe Bottom.





EXISTING VIEW AT SIDE  
OF SEABAORD BUILDING



PROPOSED VIEW AT SIDE  
OF SEABOARD BUILDING



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

An economic development model that is firmly focused on helping African-American Richmonders today, given that this is a place where the labor and lives of Africans and people of African descent were stolen, is an important goal of our proposal.


While Shockoe Bottom is ripe for dramatic reinvestment, we believe there are ways to do this development in a new way, one that is built from the start to provide good jobs, and business opportunities not simply for the so-called “creative class” but for regular Richmonders. We suggest the following components for economic advancement in Shockoe Bottom.

We propose making investment in education a central component of what happens next in Shockoe Bottom. Virginia Union University (VUU) can draw a direct line to Shockoe Bottom, indeed, to Lumpkin’s Jail. It was on the site of Lumpkin’s after the Civil War that an educational institution was founded that eventually became VUU. In honor of that legacy, and with a focus on the needs of young people today, we propose that the major institutions – VUU, Virginia Commonwealth University, and the University of Richmond -- collaborate to create a *Center for Building Arts and Sustainable Development* in the Seaboard Building, a place where young people, and recently incarcerated individuals, can learn the varied vocations of architecture,

historic preservation, archaeology, public history, and sustainable agriculture so that they can continue the work of preserving, interpreting, and adaptively reusing Richmond’s rich history, and building a sustainable city. A long triangle of land leading from the train station across the site would be home to a learning and research farm, where sustainable agricultural techniques, derived from past and current practices, would generate new knowledge, not to mention produce that could be shared and sold at the nearby 17th Street Farmers Market.

We also urge that revenues garnered from the development of parcels around the Memorial Park be placed in a community benefit fund, dedicated in part to supporting this educational investment in the future of Richmond, and to continuing the research into the historic resources of the district. For this reason, we also support the proposal by Slave Trail Commission member David Herring for the establishment in the Bottom of a Historic Overlay District.

While we believe that tax-paying and for-profit business should be built on some of the empty lots in Shockoe Bottom, there should also be a land trust established, which would remove a portion of the land from speculation and support the creation of long-term affordable housing. Shockoe Bottom must be economically vibrant, but it cannot become one more gentrified, economically segregated neighborhood. That would dishonor the history of the place.



**We need “the courage to  
confront and confess the  
history that has made us.”**

Leonard Pitts  
Columnist

VIEW TOWARD PROPOSED *GROVE OF LIGHTS*  
AT SHOCKOE SQUARE FROM DOWNTOWN  
RICHMOND AT BROAD STREET

## 03

**CONCLUSION**

These plans are bold, but they emerge from humility. We have been sobered by the enormity of the history of violence and resilience of this raw place, and deeply moved by the commitments made by so many activists and regular Richmonders.

We hope our ideas and designs can advance the movement to finally bring Shockoe Bottom to its rightful place at the center of the American story.

*"Our country should explore ways to preserve the public memory of enslaved Americans. Their overlooked lives are an inextricable part of the historical narrative of our country....We should remember enslaved Americans for the same reason we remember anyone; because they were fathers, mothers, siblings and grandparents who made great contributions to our nation. Regardless of our country's history or our ambivalence about the memory of slavery, we can choose to remember the enslaved – the forgotten. They offer our contemporary society examples of resilience and humanity. Preserving their memory contributes to our own humanity."*

Sandra Arnold  
Founder, National Burial Database of Enslaved Americans





## *This Sacred Tree*

NOTED IN THE SPIRIT SISTERHOOD  
IS A PLACE TO GATHER TV UNIT  
WHERE ALL GOOD WOMEN RECEIVE  
AND SUPPORTED BY THE ANGELS

*May 1980*

# 04

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We feel enormous gratitude to a number of organizations that made this charrette and these design proposals possible.

The Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project ([sacredgroundproject.net](http://sacredgroundproject.net)) has led the campaign to broaden and deepen the way Shockoe Bottom and the enslaved people of Richmond are remembered.

The National Trust ([savingplaces.org](http://savingplaces.org)) has worked tirelessly to support Richmond-based institutions and individuals working on Shockoe Bottom. We thank the Trust for providing funds to allow our team to spend a week in Richmond. We were pleased to have worked and held our community meetings at a unique local institution, the Storefront of Community Design.

Preservation Virginia ([preservationvirginia.org](http://preservationvirginia.org)) was instrumental in all aspects of this charrette. The support of one of the oldest preservation organizations in the country has been enormously important for the effort.

The Black History Museum and Cultural Center (<http://blackhistorymuseum.org/>), an important new institution in Richmond, generously served as host for the public presentation of the ideas in this report.

Untold RVA ([www.facebook.com/UntoldRVA](http://www.facebook.com/UntoldRVA)) provided clear insights for the ethical presentation of the missing pieces within Richmond's historical narrative.

We also want to acknowledge the professionalism and care with which our University of Massachusetts students – Randy Crandon, Nicholas Jeffway, and Camesha Scruggs – undertook this important assignment.

Perhaps most importantly we want to thank the residents of Richmond, the thousands who have participated in community meetings, in protests, in government meetings, all to demand a simple goal, which is the mantra of our work: make that which was rendered invisible, visible again.





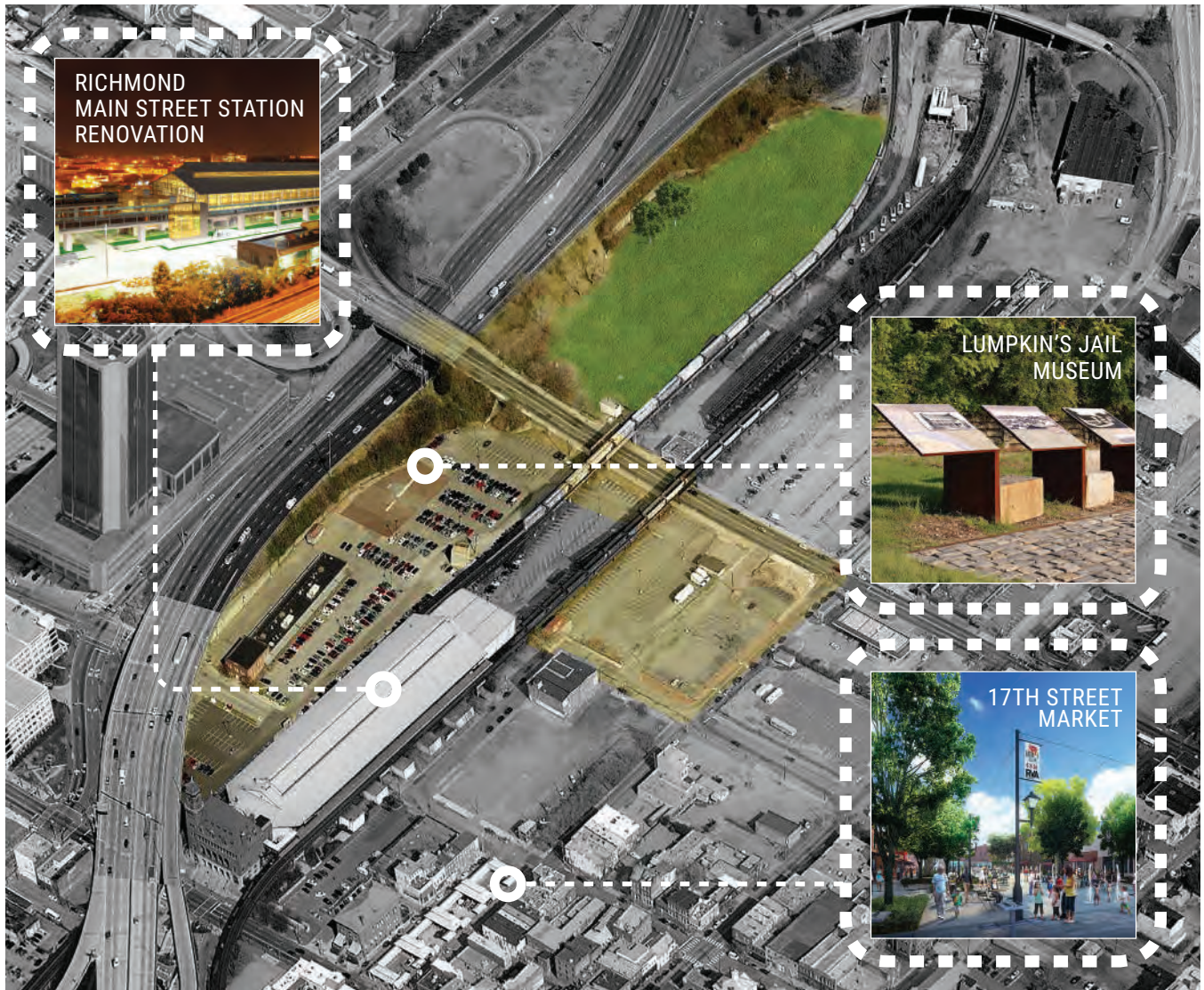
05

## APPENDIX

The drawings and maps collected in this appendix were produced as supporting material for the design charette and proposal.



# CONTEXT



IT IS THE INTENT OF OUR DESIGN PROPOSAL TO RESPOND TO AND CONNECT ADJACENT DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES IN THE AREA.









PARTICIPANTS OF THE COMMUNITY MEETINGS IDENTIFIED CONCEPTS  
AND QUALITIES FOR EACH AREA OF THE PROJECT SITE

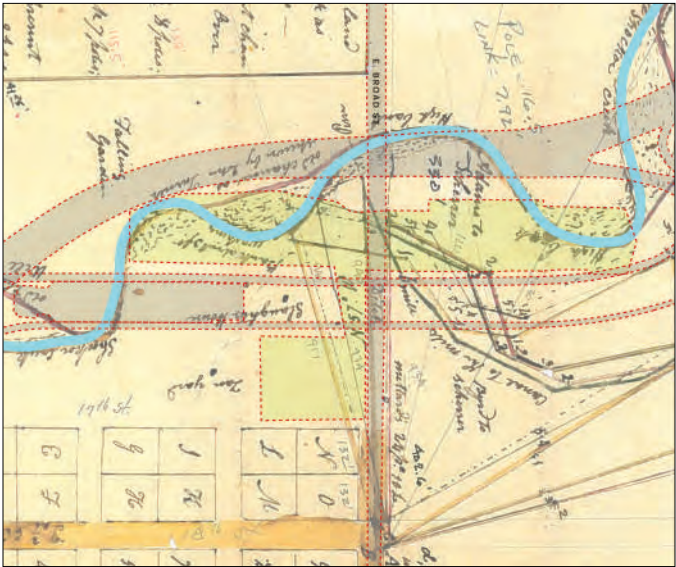


# HISTORIC MAPPING

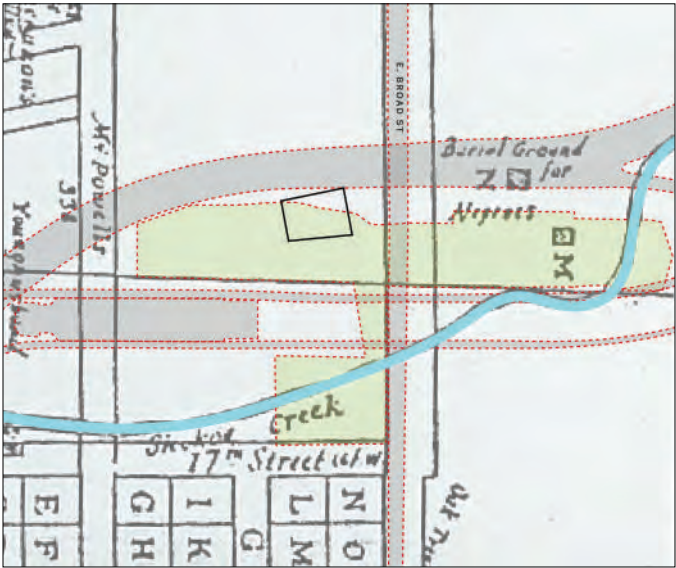
## KEY

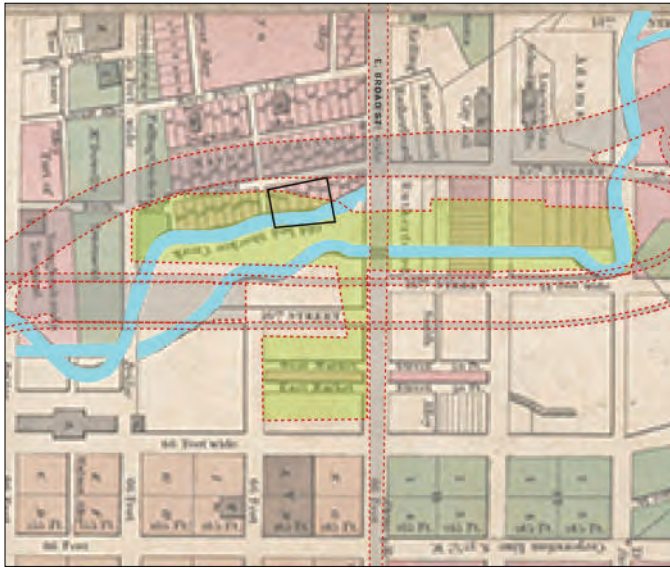
-  existing conditions
-  project site
-  lumpkin's jail lots 62, 63, 64
-  shockoe creek

1800



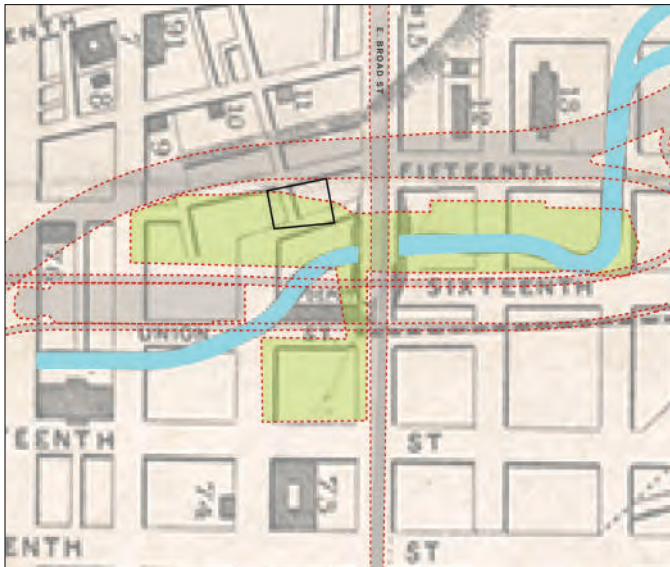
1810





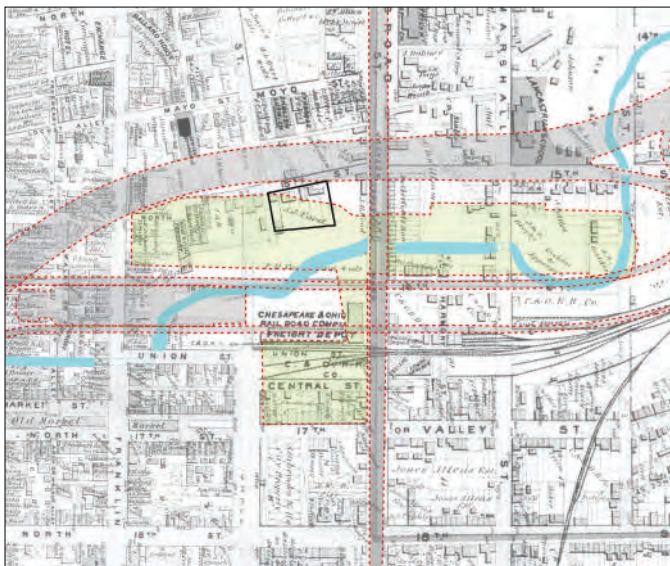
1835

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1859

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1877

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A Community Proposal for a Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park  
The Center for Design Engagement / [www.designengagement.org](http://www.designengagement.org)