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## **A Church Hill: The Birth, Death, Revival But What About the Children?**

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### **Demographics**

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I am a 57 years old African American female. I teach 7<sup>th</sup> grade English at Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School (MLK). My school is centered in the middle of a high crime, high poverty area of Richmond, Virginia called Church Hill. The school building is a \$40 million state-of-the-art middle school built in 2014. The school was created by the combination of two middle schools in the area: Eastend Middle (renamed Onslow Middle School) and Mosby Middle School. The sharp decline in the student population at the two schools was the justification for combining the schools. Mosby Middle School was built in 1964 and serviced students from K-8<sup>th</sup>. The current building is the first new school built in Church Hill since Chimborazo Elementary in 1968.

The enrollment at MLK sits at 691 students. MLK has a 100% free and reduced lunch program. The racial makeup of the school is 96.5 African American students; 1.9 white students; 0.6 Asian students. As reported in the Richmond Times Dispatch in 2017, 1,635 recorded incidents took place at MLK under the heading of disorderly and disruptive behavior offenses. Educationally, only 22% of the students are proficient in math and 27% demonstrated proficiency in reading. MLK administration has changed hands a total of five times in its four years of existence. On the average, as many as 10 teachers are absent from work leaving no coverage for their classes. The school is considered one of the worst schools in the Richmond Public School system. In a recent ranking of the 415 middle schools in Virginia, from the best to the worst, MLK is ranked as 415<sup>th</sup> (<https://www.rvaschool.net>, MLKMS).

### **History**

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In 1733, William Byrd II designed Church Hill. It is also referred to as Richmond Hill and Indian Hill. Byrd said the view of Richmond Hill reminded him of his home, Richmond-On-Thames (Wikipedia//William Byrd, II). The name Church Hill prevailed because of the number of churches and religious facilities in the area. In its past, Church Hill was a booming town within the city, known for its cash crops, tobacco, and slave trading. The James River, running south and parallel to Church Hill, made transporting slaves ideal. In fact, Richmond,

Virginia was the largest American slave trading hub outside of New Orleans. One of the battles of the Civil War took place in Church Hill at Chimborazo. Chimborazo Park became the site of the largest Civil War hospital (*National Register of Historic Places*, National Park Services, 2009-03-13). Church Hill was the site of the Confederate prison Libby Prison (Abigail Tucker, Smithsonian.com *Digging Up the Past at Richmond Jail*, 2014).

Adjacent to Church Hill, in Shockoe Bottom, was the notorious Lumpkin's Jail. From 1830 and throughout the Civil War, Lumpkin's jail was an active slave jail (Smithsonian.com *Digging Up the Past at a Richmond Jail*). Lumpkin's Jail, also known as the Devil's Half Acre, was the property of Robert Lumpkin, a hateful and prominent slave trader, who imposed harsh brutality to the slaves incarcerated within its walls. Ironically, Lumpkin married a slave named Mary and fathered five children with her. After the death of Mr. Lumpkin, Mary became the sole owner of the jail and the property on which it sat. In 1867, a Baptist minister named Nathaniel Colver was looking for a place to open a Black Seminary. Mary Lumpkin sold the land to the minister. The place once called the Devil's Half Acre was now called "God's Half Acre". Virginia Union University was housed at the site from 1867 until 1870. In 1870, the university relocated to Lombardy Street on the northside of Richmond, VA (*People and Places in African American History*.Blackpast.org.,2012).

Richmond, Virginia is settled on seven hills. Church Hill is one of the seven hills. Church Hill is the home of famed poetic, Edgar Allen Poe (Shockoe Bottom). Richmond is where Virginia's second revolutionary convention took place at St. John's Church where Patrick Henry announced "give me liberty or give me death" (*Richmond - Staples Mill Road Station, VA* (RVR), June 2010). St. John's Church still stands with a nunnery that continues to address the areas spiritual and educational needs with the help of the Catholic Dioceses. In 1957, city council declared Church Hill as a historic district.

Although *Brown v. Board of Education* took place in 1954, the state of Virginia stood firm against integration of its school system. Along with other cities in Virginia, Richmond took part in the Massive Resistance Movement refusing to integrate their public schools despite the decision of the Supreme Court. White teachers found it deplorable to teach alongside black teachers. White citizens refused to have their daughters taught by black men. Many of the white schools volunteered to closed in order to take a stand against integration. A growing number of white parents decided to place their children in private schools, no matter how costly. It would be a decade before Richmond's public schools would integrate (Brian J. Daugherty, *Desegregation in Public Schools*, Summer 2006).

During the 1960's, when public schools in Richmond became desegregated, whites who could afford it, began to take flight to the surrounding counties. The city racial makeup went from 75% white to 95% black. This practice continued through 2010. As many whites moved out, blacks began to move into formerly white neighborhoods. Oddly enough, in the 1970s, not only were whites leaving the area, many blacks followed seeking safer neighborhoods and schools for their family (Hamilton Lombard, *Richmond's Quiet Transformation*, April 2015).

Flooding had become a fact of life in Church Hill, especially in the valley of Fulton Bottom. The Main Street Train Station, built in 1901, closed because of flooding and the decline in usage. In 1972, Hurricane Agnes caused severe damage to the facility prompting Amtrak to relocate the station to Staples Mills Road in Henrico County ([wiki/Richmond\\_Main\\_Street\\_Station](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richmond_Main_Street_Station)).

Thriving businesses in the area closed shop taking their stores to the counties forming strip malls and single shops. Two of the main stable department stores, Thalhimers, founded in 1842, and Miller and Rhoads, founded in 1885 (Harry Kollatz, Jr., *Dressed to Thrill*, Richmond Magazine, 2014) would leave the city. Before Thalhimers closed, on February 22, 1960, a group of students from Virginia Union University staged a protest

against the racial segregation at the store's restaurant, the Richmond Room. The students were called "The Richmond 34". This was the city's first mass arrest during the Civil Rights Movement. In 1992, Thalhimers closed permanently and became part of the first indoor mall in the area, Cloverleaf Mall, in the neighboring county of Chesterfield (*National Register Information*, 2017).

Tobacco factories in the area began closing. Lucky Strike Tobacco, built in 1910, shut its doors. House of Edgeworth that had been operating since 1942 closed. Philip Morris moved to its newest facility in the area formerly called Manchester in the south side of Richmond. Many black neighborhoods were purchased by the state to build highways and bridge extensions. Because of the decline in population and voting issues, not only in Church Hill, but in the city of Richmond as a whole, Richmond voted to annex twenty-three square miles of the neighboring Chesterfield County. Richmond attempted and failed (due to opposition) to annex Henrico County which cradles Richmond on the east, north and west.

The two high schools in Church Hill, Armstrong and Kennedy High School, were merged because of low enrollment. Armstrong High School and Maggie L. Walker High School were the only two high schools blacks were allowed to attend in the entire city of Richmond. Armstrong High School was once the rival of Maggie L. Walker High School. Every Saturday, following Thanksgiving Day, was the Armstrong and Walker Football Classic. From 1938 to 1979, black Richmonder's would gather to watch each team compete for bragging rights to declare who had the best football team. Sadly, that tradition ended. The gridiron, City Stadium, where the games took place, was purchased by the University of Richmond, a very prestigious prominently white university. (Michael Whitt, *United in Rivalry: Richmond's Armstrong-Maggie Walker Classic*, November 6, 2009).

These series of events took a tremendous toll on the historical area. Church Hill became a wasteland of sorts. It became a haven of governmental housing projects where lower income families lived. Four of the city's major housing projects were built in Church Hill - Fairfield, Mosby, Whitcomb, and Creighton Court. Many of the residents were dependent on food stamps, welfare checks, selling and buying drugs, and even prostitution to survive. The public schools in Church Hill, especially the black schools, were run-down in a shameful state. "Good black teachers" avoided teaching in Church Hill like the plague. The projects were meant to be a short term living situation for families trying to get on their feet. However, many of the black families were trapped, forced to stay there because of housing discrimination. Government subsidized housing projects became a generational accommodation for families. With this "generational accommodation" came more crime, higher levels of poverty, and the emerging of gang affiliations.

## Revitalization of Church Hill

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For the last eight to ten years, Church Hill has been on an upswing. Dilapidated and condemned houses are being torn down or restored selling for upwards of \$300,000. Several of the old tobacco factories have been turned into luxury lofts renting for \$1,900 per month and up, targeted towards young professionals. Businesses have started coming back to the area. A flood wall has been built to protect the stores and the newly developed single family homes in Fulton Bottom. Historical buildings are receiving facelifts. In 2017, Zagat declared the area as one of the 10 hottest food neighborhoods around the U.S. In 2015, Church Hill was named the most walkable neighborhood in the city (*Zagat*, 2014). The biggest lift to the area has been from Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). VCU has a vested interest in Church Hill. VCU is expanding the

university and Church Hill is in the path of its medical campus, the top-rated level I trauma center in Virginia. Many of the old duplex houses have been converted into apartments for on-campus living for VCU's medical students. Rumors have surfaced that VCU has purchased Mosby Court Housing Project and that MLK will eventually become a specialty school for the gifted and talent students in and around Richmond. (A side note - Maggie L. Walker was closed in 1979 and later re-opened as Maggie L. Walker Governor's School for Government and International Studies. Students are accepted by application only from Richmond and 13 jurisdictions. Also, adding to the validity of the rumor, every Tuesday at 5:00 p.m., the Junior Richmond Symphony gathers to practice. No students from MLK have been invited to be a part of the symphony as of this date).

The old Farmer's Market has re-opened where local farmers can sell their produce. The night life in Church Hill's Shockoe Bottom makes it the place to be. There are night clubs, live bands, and good cuisine running the gamut from soul food to New Orleans style. The Roots, a popular music group, makes a stop in Church Hill's Rocketts Landing at least every two years drawing people to the area. Shockoe Bottom hosts the Irish festival "ShamRock the Block" where people gather not just because they are Irish, but to have good clean fun and drink all the green beer they can find. The UCI Road World Championships primary cycling track runs through Shockoe Bottom and Church Hill. Church Hill even has a new grocery store, The Market at 8<sup>th</sup> and Main, complete with a salad bar and hot and cold food deli. CVS Drugstore has opened shop in Church Hill which makes it the first franchised drugstore in the area. (Kathryn S. Parkhurst, *A Case Study of Gentrification in Church Hill*).

## Rationale

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With all the revitalization that has taken place in Church Hill, the housing projects still exist and have continued to become run-down shelters for residents in the neighborhood. During the winter of 2017, fifty residents in the Creighton Court Housing Projects were without heat from December to February. The housing authority seemed to have been "dragging their feet" to repair the heating system. Some residents were provided one single space heater per apartment. Other residents were placed in hotels until the situation was rectified. It would not be until March 2018 that residents would see permanent repairs to the heating systems (Gretchen Ross, *8 Investigates*, 4/11/2018).

Neighborhood students see the changes in Church Hill - white residents walking their dogs, fancy restaurants, boutiques, and new apartment buildings springing up. Eastend Middle School re-opened and become Franklin Military School where attendance is by application and invitation only. Yet, this change has not filtered down to their neighborhoods. Students see their neighborhood is still old, dirty, and crime infested. In 1970, while the murder rate declined in Richmond, the Church Hill area murder rate doubled. In their neighborhood, they see Arabic convenient stores with bars on the windows, where EBT cards are used to purchase everything from cigarettes, alcohol, and drugs. They witness Asian hair shops charging resident's ridiculous prices for their products. The shop owners know the residents have no choice but to pay their prices - they know many lack the transportation to travel to more affordable hair stores. They have taken notice of the new grocery store. They talk about the new grocery store being clean while the small grocery stores in their neighborhood are so smelly that the stench of rotten produce, meats, and fish hits you as soon as you walk through the door.

Despite all of the changes in the area, the mentality of the most residents has not changed. Survival mode prevails: kill or be killed, sell and use drugs, commit welfare fraud, steal from each other, drop out of middle or high school. Many students' parents in the area did not complete high school or attend college. The same can be said about their grandparents. Street hustling, drug dealing, prostitution, receiving checks from Social Services for supposedly disabled children has proven profitable. Therefore, many residents see nothing wrong with not having a high school diploma. For many, education is a low priority. This ideology has been passed on to their children. The prison pipeline seems to be inevitable.

What seems to perpetuate this concept is a newspaper in Richmond called the *Gotcha* Paper (Richmond Times Dispatch, 2018). The Richmond Times Dispatch has the largest circulation in Richmond, Virginia (circulation weekly 89,401 and Sunday 120,280) and second highest in circulation in Virginia. This paper displays all the residents of Richmond and surrounding counties who been arrested or convicted of all types of crimes from minor infractions to first degree murder. So many students are interested in reading the *Gotcha* Paper than reading a good book. Many of the offenders in the paper are former students, my students' parents, relatives, or friends of the family.

There are too many academically smart, talented, and gifted black students in Church Hill to take a spectator's seat and let this ideology continue. I cannot let what has happened to my students' parents and grandparents be the indicator of their futures. If Church Hill has moved from a place of greatness, fallen, and revived, then so should the educational process and mentality of the students in this area. I want my students to know that they can break this "generational curse", plug up this pipeline, move to a better position in life, and most importantly, turn around and help another student hoping to get out of the "crab basket".

Needless to say, my students are traumatized. They function in what is described by Paul Tough's book, *How Children Succeed*, as the "firehouse effect". Our bodies regulate stress by using a system called HPA axis. HPA stands for "hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal". The HPA sends chemicals through the brain and the body in reaction to intense situations much like the impulse reaction fireman have when a call is dispatched to the station. My students (and students like them all over the country) are thrust into this firehouse effect every day of their young lives. They don't know if dad will abuse mom tonight, if they will be physically or sexually abused, if the gun shots they hear will hit them or someone they know, or if they will have electricity and food. If the body's stress-management systems are overworked, it eventually breaks down under the strain. This break down will lead to serious health problems or death. Therefore, my curriculum unit will be centered around how I can show my students options that will help them avoid a life of crime and not become a statistic headed to the prison pipeline. It is my hope my curriculum unit will be a catalyst for change.

## The Theory

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Traumatized children cannot understand cause-and-effect relationships. These children have difficulty internalizing what is an appropriate reaction and what is not appropriate. This leads to a child's lack of motivation and poor behavior in the classroom. Traumatized children are easily distracted or lack focus in the classroom. Their school work and behavior becomes problematic. Because of the adverse situations they witness every day, traumatized children gravitate to the wrong things. Many traumatized children exhibit the symptoms of anxiety, hypervigilance to danger, or attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. According to Tough's researchers, ADHD and trauma often coexist. Children diagnosed with ADHD have difficulty

regulating their emotions. Their ability to self-regulate their emotions is critical to being able to function in a classroom setting. They have difficulty sitting in one place for a short amount of time, they cannot pay attention for a sustained amount of time, or have trouble completing assignments.

Jeffrey A. Butts (Ph.D., University of Michigan) is the Director of Research and Evaluation at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Dr. Butts' work focuses on discovering and improving the effectiveness of policies and programs related to the juvenile justice system. Dr. Butts talks about several methods that can be used to dismantle risk factors of youth becoming juvenile delinquents and ultimately incarcerated as adults. According to the book *Helping Traumatized Children Learn* (a collaborative writing of Susan F. Cole, Jessica O'Brien, M. Gerod Gadd, Joel Ristuccia, D. Luray Wallace, and Michael Gregory) "when children witness violence between their adult caregivers or experience abuse or neglect, they enter the classroom believing that the world is an unpredictable and threatening place. Children in this condition typically are ill-prepared for the academic and social challenges of the classroom. Oftentimes, concentration is nearly impossible for that child". Aaron Kupchik's book *The School-to-Prison Pipeline*, and various PDFs and articles give facts about the school-to-prison pipeline and its effects and ways to afford this pipeline.

Described below are Dr. Butts' eight modules of prevention methods and if applied effectively, can have lasting effects in teaching traumatized children:

Family communication: Parents need to have an open and honest dialogue with their children. Open communication and dialogue is critical. According to the research conducted by the Coalition for Juvenile Justice, adolescents are very impressionable and they lack sound judgement skills. The research also found adolescents lack the correct dopamine levels that control the pleasure area of the brain causing them not to understand their level of pleasure. For example, a child may find comfort and pleasure in playing with toys soldiers or doll babies. However, as their dopamine level matures, the child will learn to adopt new and more advanced levels of comfort like baseball or dress-up. Family communication will enable the child to develop less risky pleasures. A child without family communication and guidance may seek transition from play fighting to actual street fighting or playing with toy guns to shooting real guns.

Family communication helps children be at ease when faced with difficult situations. Today's youth are faced with situations not known to their parents. Youth have to deal with excessive bullying (cyber, physical, mental), issues of gender orientation, acceptance or isolation, subtle racism and overt racism, gang involvement, drugs, and technology. Parents need to have communication with their children that celebrates achievements. When youth are faced with these troubling issues, knowing a parent or another relative has a vested interest in their development is reassuring. Even if the parent has never experienced these issues, just knowing a parent will help them navigate through the situation builds confidence. Parents need to pay close attention to their children's non-verbal messages. Non-verbal communication can be as powerful as verbal communication and can offer insight as to what their child is experiencing but not saying. Parents also need to be active listeners. Parents need to try their best to understand their children's point of view. Being an active listener also means the parent should respect their child's opinions. Parents should strive to speak with their children in a clear and direct manner - never leaving room for conversations to be misinterpreted.

With the traumatized child, lack of communication may lead to seeking the constant approval of a parent even if the expectations are unrealistic. The child will constantly look for ways to gain approval and validation from the parent. Because traumatized children are accustomed to chaos, they often try to appear in control despite feeling out of control. The result of this constant exposure, the child will become a perfectionist. The perfectionist mentality inflicted upon traumatized children causes them to become easily frustrated and give

up when they encounter difficulty mastering a task. Traumatized students lack the language to fully express their feelings. They often display fear of the unknown, shame, anger, depression, and guilt. Traumatic experiences disrupt the ability of children to learn and process verbal information and use language to communicate. Difficulty in expressing their feelings and internalizing their feelings puts traumatized children at risk for somatic symptoms. (Stephen Green, Virginia Tech., *Families First Keys to Successful Functioning: Communication*, May 1, 2004).

**A non-parental adult role model:** The non-parental adult role model can be a part of a network of responsible adults that guide youth through advice and demonstrate by example. A necessary non-parental adult role model should be a child's teacher. This is an opportunity for teachers to get to know their students and earn the traumatized students' trust. With nurtured individual relationships with students, the teacher can earn a higher buy in when teaching, longer attention spans, producing high scores or show growth on standardized testing. Students will take ownership of their misbehavior and self-correct and they take ownership of their classmates' behavior. Not only can a child's teacher be their non-parental adult role model, athletic coaches, school counselors, and school administrators can fill the role.

Children who are traumatized lack the ability to process information and cannot distinguish between threatening and non-threatening situations which leads to the inability to form trusting relationships with adults, particularly their teacher. Childhood trauma and a failure to do well in academics go hand-in-hand. Because of this inability, traumatic children often experience difficulty with literacy skills and behavioral self-regulation (*Helping Traumatic Children Learn*).

When the teacher asks the traumatized student to comply with simple instructions, the student may act as if they did not hear the teacher or simply refuse to comply. To the traumatized student, complying with simple directives can be seen as a threat leaving them vulnerable. Some traumatized children will react to directives by disengagement, withdrawal, or dissociating - "going away" in their minds. Disengagement or dissociating causes the child to miss large amounts of learning.

**Peer role models:** Children should have a circle of friends that offer support, share safe interests and contribute to their emotional growth. Having friends to share feelings with when going through a "rough patch" makes the experience easier to cope with. Peer role models show you who you are. People, in general, seek out friends who have similar interest and actions. Good peer role models help one another stay focused. Good friends know each other inside and out; sometimes they are able to spot things that their friend cannot see or for some reason has chosen to overlook. A good peer model is not afraid to speak their mind when a friend gets out of line. A good peer model can serve as a source of inspiration.

A good peer role model is essential for traumatized children since they have problems dealing with adults. They behave confrontationally or overact when they are being disciplined or redirected by the teacher. They often vie for power with the classroom teacher. Traumatized children feel they are only safe if they are in control of their surroundings. Traumatized children do not like surprises and they cannot handle spontaneous events or change. These children may find it difficult to make transitions during the course of the school day. A good peer role model can help the traumatized student transition from lessons in the class to changes they may alter the school day.

**Good health practices:** A child's lifestyle that includes regular exercise and nutrition helps with their physical and mental development. Regular exercise eliminates the possibility of becoming overweight and high levels of stress. A good nutritional balance of the five food groups significantly lowers the possibility of developing stress-related and chronic diseases. Children should get regular check-ups by pediatricians, dentists, and have

regular eye exams. These factors are necessary in developing and maintaining a healthy body for life (*Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011*).

Traumatized children often do not have good health practices. Traumatized children may have frequent headaches, complain about gastrointestinal problems, and body pains. Traumatized children may experience extended periods of fatigue, sleeplessness and eating disorders. Somatic symptoms can lead to time absent from school and constant request to go to the restroom or school nurse's office. These activities adversely affect the student's academic performance.

Time spent in group activities: A connection to an organization or league, be it religious, artistic or athletic fosters a sense of belonging and teamwork skills. Group activities help youth develop good decision-making skills, conflict resolution skills, and problem solving skills. Group activities enhance social skills and interactions. Group activities with students from diverse backgrounds provide opportunities to share experiences with other students. Students who may be introverted can have an opportunity to be heard.

When traumatic children have no outlet and school has become too difficult or bothersome, they often find themselves in situations that lead to criminal offenses. The traumatic child will most certainly end up in the juvenile justice system.

Community involvement: An attachment to society can spark a sense of engagement with the youth. Youth involved in community activities develop the skill of resilience. The idea is that resilient communities have the capacity to support youth in times of need. By youths developing positive relationships within the community, youths grow to understand the value of their community. Youths involved in the community tend to demonstrate increased social participation and be involved in community actions (*The Positive Effects of Youth Community Engagement, 2013-2018*).

Responsible choices: Parents need to develop within their children the ability to judge situations, evaluate risks, and make good and positive long-term decisions. Being able to make sound decisions at an early age, helps children to develop the skills necessary for adulthood decision making. Bad decision making is an essential part of maturity, but if poor decision becomes a pattern, it can be the recipe for destruction. Parents cannot abruptly thrust their children into making good decisions, it has to be a process. Parents need to start with small doses. A perfect example for a young child is having them decide what candy they want at the check-out line. Boundaries need to be set, otherwise the child will be overwhelmed by the choices. A parent could give them a small number of items in which to choose from, making the process less cumbersome. As the child matures, the decision making should increase at their level of maturity (*Parenting: Decision Making-Help Your Child Become Good Decision Makers, October, 19, 2009*).

Aspirations for the future: Aspiration help fosters children's vision of their destiny and belief that their goals are attainable. High aspirations of children, with the support from their parents, has a direct link to higher school achievement. Developing high aspirations as a child is a good predictor of the child meeting goals as an adult. High aspirations must be coupled with high expectations in order to be fully affective. A well connected family with clear values and goals, will make it easier for a child to set their aspirations and meet or exceed their expectations. Setting high aspirations and expectations at an early age also forms a positive attitude toward education, career goals, and work ethics. Parents need to expose their children to positive and fulfilling experiences and cultures, such as theatre or art, music, languages, technology, and diversity of people. These exposures enable children to be well-rounded and understand that no aspiration or expectation is out of reach (*Nabil Khattab, Students' Aspiration Expectation and School Achievement*).



For traumatized children, everything looks bleak; they expect themselves to fail. Children surviving daily trauma typically have a low sense of self-worth. Because the inner self is so off balanced, they have no way to develop an internal road map to guide them. Therefore, what the child relies on is the notion to act instead of plan.

## Juvenile Justice System

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The juvenile justice system was created based on the hope that all children can be rehabilitated into law-abiding, productive citizens. The underlying principle is that children are different from adults and can be rehabilitated if given a second chance (Alexandra Wilding, *Juvenile Justice System*, June 1, 2011).

According to *The School-to-Prison Pipeline*, the consequences for the above modules not being adhere to, often leads the traumatized child to the juvenile justice system. Studies have shown that boys and girls initial introduction to the juvenile or criminal justice system is shaped by his or her school experiences. School offers the first public exposure to social, emotional, behavioral, cognitive learning for most youths. Youth, who do poorly in school, become frustrated, they fail to advance academically, and eventually they pursue illegal activities rather than graduate from high school. Schools perceive traumatic children's behavior as problematic and often do not deal with the behavior properly. Research shows that traumatic children have not fully developed the appropriate skills to interpret long term consequences and they act on impulse, therefore they run the risk of future punishment within the juvenile justice system (Aaron Kupchik, *The School-to-Prison Pipeline*).

Girls make up a growing percentage of the juvenile justice population. From 1985 to 2009, delinquent crimes among girls increased by 86% (from 222,900 in 1985 to 415,600 in 2009). For boys, the rate of delinquency increased slightly by 17% over the same period of time. Girls entering the juvenile justice system are more likely to be there because of nonviolent offenses. These offenses typically extend from child abuse, violence exposure, mental health problems, pregnancy, and failure in school (Ossai Miazad, *The Gender Gap: Treatment of Girls in the United States Juvenile Justice System*, 2002). Boys entering the juvenile justice system are more likely there as the result of violent crimes, association with deviant peers, physical aggression or oppositional attitudes and behaviors. Among boys, a diagnosis of conduct disorder (CD) is one of the strongest predictors of adult antisocial and aggressive behavior.

A traumatic or problematic child acts up in class, the teacher feels powerless to rectify the situation, so school security is called in, the school security is not willing to help the child, so the child is sent to the principal. The principal does not want to deal with the situation, so the police are called to intervene. Communicating to police, leads to the youth having an arrest record, going to juvenile court, juvenile detention, and eventually time in prison. Inappropriate discipline in the school undermines its primary goal of educating the child. Almost always the children arriving at school with the fewest social and academic skills are unfairly targeted by school officials. It appears that having the child removed for the school is much easier than having to deal with or analyze the hidden causes for a child's misconduct. The process of becoming a statistic of the school-to-prison pipeline can often be diverted at the school level.

The school-to-prison pipeline is not equal amongst races. Students of color, who come from low-income homes, tend to be suspended, expelled, and arrested more than any other race. Black youths are singled out

for punishment more than Hispanics and Asians. Black youths are perceived to be a threat or too loud and too physical. Black youths are targeted for their style of clothing which is interpreted as a “thug like” appearance. Black youths make up a large majority of juveniles in the legal system. Its most direct victims are the poorest and least educated black males. Research shows that school policies vary in ways that correlate directly with the race of the student body and socioeconomic status (*The School-to-Prison Pipeline*).

Schools that continuously deal with behavior issues by having the police intervene, ultimately cause other issues. Students who must be removed from class miss instructional time, which has a direct effect on students being able to pass standardized test mandated by the state. There is speculation that the pressure of demonstrating high scores on required standardized testing, causes school administrators to intentionally suspend misbehaved students so they are not present on the day of testing. The student further develops a deeper sense of powerlessness and alienation for school. Students who are continuously suspended from school do not feel connected to society and typically become adults who defy authority and disobey rules.

The school-to-prison pipeline eventually means the child will have to make an appearance before a judge. Many professionals are beginning to voice their concern that juvenile justice system closely mirrors adult criminal court systems and its punishment is viewed as oftentimes too severe. Punishment for juvenile delinquency has been reversed in one area - the eradication of juveniles receiving the death penalty.

It is the belief that if a juvenile is incarcerated for a particular crime, they will receive education within a juvenile detention center. There are some facilities that do not have a system to educate confined youth. Without access to education, children have little to no chance of removing themselves from the prison pipeline. Some states even maintain the notion that if the youth is released under probation, that youth is not entitled to an education. To provide adequate education or vocational training can foster a sense of hope. This hope maybe the catalyst for the child not returning to prison as an adult.

Depending on the offense, traumatic children can now be committed to adult prisons. Approximately seven thousand children are held in adult jails and forty-one hundred are committed to adult prisons. Being converted to an adult prison means the child will have a lesser chance of obtaining an education. Adult facilities are not required to offer educational instruction.

When the child is committed to an adult jail or prison, some states do not provide educational services for youth who in public schools were eligible for special service due to a disability. Youths with disabilities in public schools receive additional services in the classroom and have Individual Educational Plans (IEPs). In facilities that have an educational plan, there is often failure to include IEPs as part of the instructional process. Adult facilities are not required to have qualified teaching staff to implement the IEP.

## **Coming Out of or Disruption of the School-to-Prison-pipeline: A Model for Change**

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“More than 90,000 American youth were incarcerated in 2006. One-third were under the age of 16. More than two-thirds were nonwhite” (*Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement Databook*). David Domenici, in the book *The School-to-Prison Pipeline*, voiced concern about youth who were dropping out of school, who were living on the streets, who were assigned to uncommitted alternative schools. It appeared no one was

interested in the idea of having a school for youths who were behind academically, who possess extensive suspensions or expulsions, and who had been locked up in juvenile detentions centers, jail, and prison. The prevailing attitude was “it was too late for them”. Domenici wanted to know if these youths were interested in attending school and if so, what type of school would work for them? The youth’s answer were small classes, a chance to work and make money, counseling, and teachers who sincerely cared about them.

Having smaller classes tend to lessen the traumatic child sense of vulnerability. Smaller classes equate to more one-on-one with teachers. More one-on-one teacher experiences leads to diminishing the fear of trusting an adult. Caring teachers can make a tremendous difference in a traumatic child’s perception of life and being able to reach their destiny. A teacher who deeply cares about their students will challenge them and support them. A chance to work and make money fosters a sense of responsibility, good decision making skills, good work ethics, and develops a sense of worthiness. Counseling aids with the process of healing for traumatic children. Oftentimes traumatic children develop the “why me” syndrome. Counseling can explore this question and help traumatic children come to a place of healing and eventually letting go of past hurts.

This was the foundation that lead David Domenici and James Forman, Jr. to create the Maya Angelou Public Charter School. A stumbling block for the creation was there were very few successful models to patent the school after. The “nay sayers” warned that these “misfits kids” bring down test scores, they make it hard to create good behavioral norms and make it harder to run a good school. Nevertheless, the decision was made to move forward with the school. The school started with 20 students, 4 teachers, and one counselor. The first campus had an enrollment of 120 students. A few years later a second campus enrolled 200 students.

There are no admission restrictions for the Maya Angelou Public Charter School. Students are actively recruited from the juvenile system. Students with special needs are admitted and youth who have dropped out of school. Many of the students are academically years behind. Many have disabilities that were never addressed in their public school. The majority of the high school and middle school students at Maya Angelou, are performing at the elementary school level. Despite the students’ deficiencies, the curriculum for the school is rigorous and relevant. The curriculum focuses on essential skills and content. The school offers extended-day programs with enrichment courses such as dance, music, art, speech and debate, nonviolence workshops, street law, and yoga. Standardize testing is measured by growth and not by score.

Maya Angelou Public Charter School refutes the idea that kids who come from traumatic homes, who have been abused, who feel unworthy are not able to learn. Students at Maya Angelou learn to control and reflect on their actions, set goals, and plan a course of action to attain their goals. The students learn to take responsibility for themselves. One of the school’s first graduate of the school was interviewed and gave her testimony. The student, Samantha, talked about how she had been locked up at the age of 15, how a judge initially denied her public offender’s request for her to attend the school. She said the judge said she did not belong in such a school and she was a menace to society. She talked about how David Domenici spoke up for her and she was granted the opportunity to attend the school. Samantha later became the first president of the Maya Angelou Public Charter School. Samantha, formerly incarcerated, special education, labeled as lost, is now a teacher and advocates for the Oak Hill Juvenile Jail.

Maya Angelou Public Charter School is one example of change for youths. There is also hope for traumatic children who are now adults and desire the chance to do better, become educated, become a law abiding citizen, and give back to help others escape the prison-pipeline.

Susan Burton, along with Cari Lynn, is the author of the book *Becoming Ms. Burton*. For 15 years, Susan Burton was in and out of jail. Her family life was one of uncertain ups and downs. At first her family lived a

somewhat normal life. Her father had a stable job working at the local sheet metal factory. Her mother, although educated, cleaned houses for white people. When her father lost his job, things changed dramatically. Her dad began to abuse her mom out of anger. He whipped her brothers until they bleed or fell to their knees. The father's justification for the harsh whippings was that was the way his father disciplined him and that was the way his grandfather disciplined his father. Eventually, Susan's dad left the family. Around the age of four or five, Susan was sexually abused by her Aunt Elizabeth crazy boyfriend. Later in her life, her son, Marque was hit and killed by an unmarked police van. At the age of 15, she gave birth to her daughter, Antoinette, conceived out of rape. She was addicted to crack cocaine; she would prostitute herself for drugs. Through her time in jail, she would find hope in a program called A New Way of Life. Susan, also attended AA programs and participated in the 12 step program.

Susan Burton lived the life of a traumatic child. It was difficult for her to trust and she felt the same hopelessness other traumatic children feel. School was not providing her the help or counseling she needed. Susan felt the need to be educated, but her dream was halted by her past. She wanted to enroll in nursing school, but was denied because of a felony conviction.

Because Susan Burton participated with the program, A New Way of Life, she learned to trust again. The program opened doors for her to meet people who would help her find her way (especially a man named Saul Sarabia). She soon discovered her talent for speaking to audiences about her past and it was effective. Again, she knew she would have to be educated so that her talk was not "raw". Susan enrolled in Southwest College majoring in psychology and chemical dependency counseling. Susan discovered that education, hard work, and a community of support were the keys that helped her discover her life had meaning and value.

## Curriculum

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Objective: To educate students at MLK about the history and culture of Church Hill and its prominence to Richmond, Virginia; to develop skills to become a productive citizen and law abiding adult. The historical segment of the unit can be taught cross the curriculums of History, English, and Mathematics.

Activities:

- Field trips to the new Black Museum of Culture (Washington, D.C.) to see artifacts from Church Hill. Students can have discussions of the significance of the building's architecture and design. Students can study how the building was designed to accommodate the breakdown of slave houses, street and Chuck Berry's car, and other large exhibits. Students can study the timeframe from which articles were used and their origin. Students can study which families from Church Hill contributed artifacts and why they felt it necessary to preserve the items.
- Teachers can coordinate walking tours of Historical Church Hill. Teachers can have students write research about Church Hill landmarks. Students can do research papers writing about the Black civil rights pioneers of Richmond.
- The students can write about how Jim Crowe laws were aimed at suppressing the black race. A mock retrial can be conducted on one or more of the murder cases where whites were found not guilty of crimes against blacks or discover why there were no trials at all (i.e. Emmett Till, George Stinney, Jr.,

Mary Turner, or James Chaney).

- Students can have an opportunity to learn about “separate but equal” and the impact it has had on their education. Interviews can be conducted with individuals who attended school during the time of segregation. Families who left the city because of white flight, can be included in the interviews.
- Students can learn about mass incarceration and how it impacts the black community.
- Students can study the resiliency modules and have discussions on how the modules and theories have affected their lives.
- MLK teachers need to integrate into the curriculum strategies to deal with traumatic events in the lives of their students. MLK has a 45-minute block that is labeled “enrichment” for teachers to have remediation sessions and/or elective teachers teach art. This time can be used for character building sessions and/or crisis intervention. Each student should have a copy of *Race to Incarcerate* to foster relevant discussions on the prison system. Counseling should be available for students effected by rape, drug abuse, and domestic violence. There should be required electives that deal with money management and job training skills. There should be time set aside in the school schedule to have “peace talks and restorative justice circles”. The females at MLK need to be educated about feminine hygiene and teen pregnancy. Females and males need to be educated about sexually transmitted diseases and healthy intimate relationships.
- During Black History Month, students could further learn about the rich black history and about historical Black men and women of the area. The students could have discussions about why Mary Lumpkin risked her life sneaking extra food and medical supplies to the slaves. The students need to know that when the Black slaves were freed from Lumpkin’s jail, they marched together and started one of the most prominent black communities in America – Jackson Ward. The citizens of Jackson Ward had their own bank, St. Luke Penny Savings Bank (founded by Maggie L. Walker), their own hotel The Eggleston Hotel – the only hotel where famous African Americans could stay, restaurants, shops, and an undertaker (A.D. Price). A.D. Price taught other undertakers the business of mortuary science. They need to know that one of the first negro senior citizen home was in Church Hill (The Afro Home) and was the spring board that other facilities patent their homes after. The students have discussions about Lawrence Douglas Wilder (the first African American governor) was born, raised and educated in Church Hill. The students need to learn about Arthur Ashe, first African American to win at Wimbledon, graduated from Armstrong High School. The students need to know that Max Robinson, the first African American news anchor in the United States, also graduated from Armstrong High School. They need to learn about Henry Marsh, civil rights leader and Richmond’s first African American mayor, attended George Mason Elementary School. The students need to learn about Richmonder’s Bill Bojangles and Snow Ball Crump, the famous tap dancers who entertained around the world. The students need to be taught about the Richmond gospel singing quartet, the Harmonizing Four. The group were the only African Americans asked to sing at the funeral service of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.
- Students can visit VCU Medical Center and learn about programs it offers. Students can participate in VCU’s middle school discovery programs to learn about in-depth science and technology projects, engineering, arts, and health sciences projects. Students can learn the school’s requirements for enrollment and how they can start working towards attendance in middle school.

## Outcome

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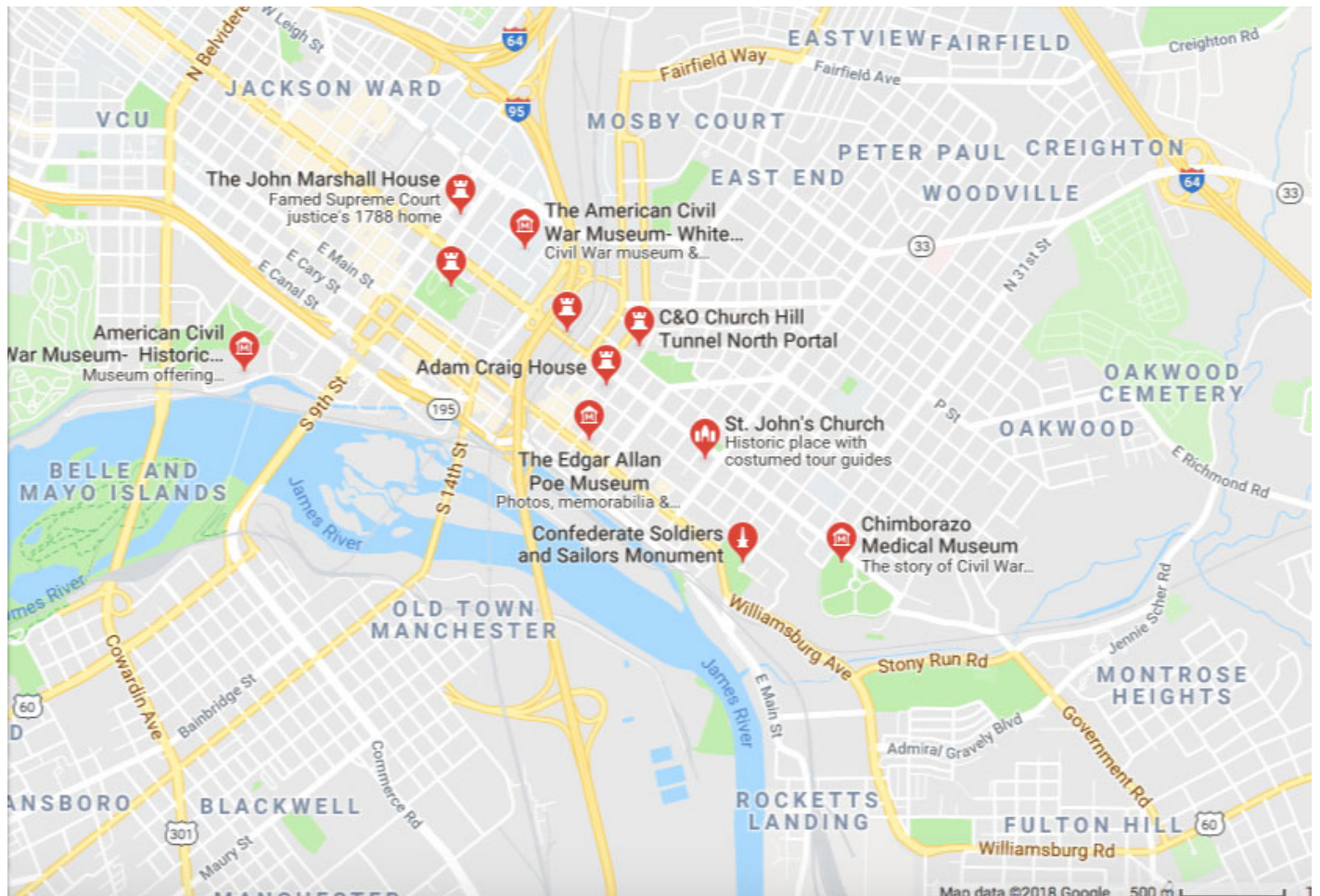
- Students will develop an appreciation of their educational experience.
- Students will develop a strong sense of community pride and engagement.
- Students will come to appreciate the area in which they live in and its rich history.
- Students will learn more about their black heritage and the people who shaped the history of Richmond, Virginia, in particular, Church Hill.
- Students will develop research and writing skills.
- Students will develop project development, engineering, and health science skills.
- Students will put into practice the modules to prevent becoming a part of the school-to-prison pipeline.

(See diagrams of Church Hill and historical landmarks of the area below)

Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School is located under the blue box marked Union Hill (Mosby Street)



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