

“THE VIRGINIA WAY”: RACE, THE “LOST CAUSE,” & THE SOCIAL INFLUENCE OF DOUGLAS SOUTHALL FREEMAN

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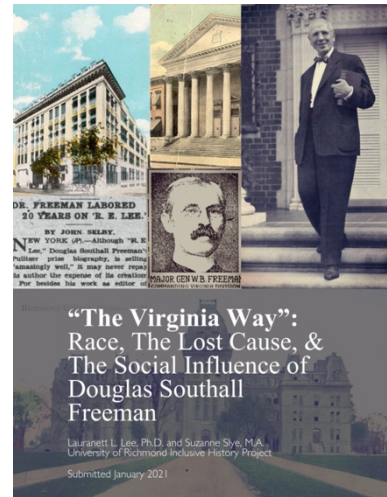
Submitted on behalf of the University of Richmond Inclusive History Project, January 2021

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In November 2018, President Ronald A. Crutcher charged the [Presidential Commission for University History and Identity](#) to study the University of Richmond’s history and its implications for the current campus and the future by exploring how institutional history is recorded, preserved, and made accessible to a diverse audience; re-examining the past to identify people and narratives previously excluded from institutional history; and recommending ways to acknowledge and communicate a more inclusive history.

As part of the resulting recommendations included in the commission’s report, [Making Excellence Inclusive: University Report and Recommendations](#) (July 2019), the university has actively engaged with the institution’s history focusing on areas of enslavement, race and segregation. The Inclusive History Project was tasked with the examination of three subjects: the burying ground on the campus, the life and influence of Robert Ryland, and the influence of Douglas Southall Freeman. The considerations of Robert Ryland and Douglas Southall Freeman were prompted by the joint resolution of the Westhampton College and Richmond College Student Government, “On Changing the Narrative: Regarding Building Names.”¹ In undertaking this research, the University of Richmond is committed to providing a more holistic narrative of its own history, one that is more complete and accurate.² The reports are not intended to



¹ The Joint Resolution was passed by the Richmond College and Westhampton College Student government Associations on April 3, 2019. It was sent to the Interim Coordinating Council and to the Vice President for Student Development, Student Development Division. The resolution was co-authored by A. J. Polcari (class of 2021) and Caroline Schiavo.

² [“On Changing the Narrative: Regarding Building Names”], *The Collegian*, [n.d.], web, [link](#).

reach any conclusion or to offer recommendations. They are designed to provide a thorough and accurate record that will augment existing accounts of institutional history and further future conversations.

This report, *“The Virginia Way”: Race, The Lost Cause & The Social Influences of Douglas Southall Freeman*, is focused on the impact that Douglas Southall Freeman (1886-1953) had on the city of Richmond, the University of Richmond, and the nation. It devotes particular attention to his perspective and actions related to race and racial issues. It contains the research findings of Suzanne Slye, M.A., whose work was conducted as part of the Inclusive History Project led by Dr. Laurant L. Lee between September 2019 and December 2020. Content contributions, research, and editorial assistance have been provided by Shelby M. Driskill, M.F.A. Editorial assistance has been provided by Meriwether Gilmore, M.A. Research assistance has been provided by Ayele d’Almeida (BA, 2020), Catherine Franceski (BA, 2020).

The report provides overall historical context for contemporary consideration of Freeman’s public roles and his work, and an examination of the ways in which he affected the University of Richmond and is memorialized there. The scope of research has included three areas of study:

1. The ways in which Freeman’s work and his public and private views related to the subjects of race and segregation
2. His contributions to the University of Richmond in his roles as a writer, editor, rector and trustee
3. His immediate and lasting influence as a public intellectual

Freeman was a graduate of Richmond College and later served on the University of Richmond Board of Trustees and was University Rector. As an influential newspaper editor, radio broadcaster, historical biographer, educator, and public speaker, Freeman guided public opinion on subjects ranging from household matters to international policy.³ He is most known for his Pulitzer Prize winning four-volume biography of Robert E. Lee.⁴ He also earned a posthumous Pulitzer Prize for

³ Freeman had a similar scope of subject matter in his *News Leader* editorials. One example of his more lighthearted items, which contrasts with his pieces that addressed political and social issues, was his defense of Virginia ham, “Saving Virginia Ham,” (November 6, 1924) in which he suggested the Chamber of Commerce should sponsor the trademark of Virginia ham given the reputation it had acquired. He believed Virginia ham to be the best in the country and saw the need to protect the brand against “imitation.” Freeman described the variety of ham as a piece of “Virginiana,” writing, “Virginia ham has long deserved the fame to which it has now attained...It could be made as renowned a product as Virginia tobacco and could be a source of a large and most profitable trade.” He suggested, “To be protected against imitation that discredits it, Virginia ham should be standardized and marketed under a registered trademark.”

⁴ Both *R.E. Lee: A Biography* and *George Washington* were well-received by the public and by critics. Available scholarly and critical reviews of Freeman’s were almost entirely positive. Johnson notes the reviews of historians Henry Steel Commanger and Dumas Malone, and quotes Malone who wrote of Freeman, “No scholar I have known was more conscientious about personal examination of source material” (Johnson, 329). Historian Samuel Eliot Morison called Freeman “the first of our military

his seven-volume biography on George Washington.⁵ At the height of his career, Freeman wielded extraordinary influence over the general public, military leaders, business magnates, and politicians. Freeman was born in 1886 and died in 1953, one year before the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was handed down by the Supreme Court. Due to limited streams of information – when public awareness of the news was largely confined to newspapers and radio broadcasts – and popular respect for his opinions and advice, his stances on race and racial issues profoundly affected opinion, practice, and policy during his lifetime and helped to lay the groundwork for Virginia’s organized resistance to integration, [known as “Massive Resistance.”](#)

While the report is not intended to be a comprehensive biography of Freeman, aspects of his biography are included as they relate to the subjects considered.⁶

Throughout his adulthood, Freeman held to lessons and traditions of his youth, particularly Virginia history, “ideals” of Confederate heritage, and values centered on his Christian faith. In his adult life, he worked to maintain the social *status quo* and advocated for a “separation by consent” approach to segregation which later became part of what was referred to as the “Virginia Way.” The “Virginia Way” denotes the belief system among Virginia elites that it was their duty to govern through a “genteel brand of paternalism” intent upon maintaining social traditions and managing issues of race.⁷ Freeman’s views on race and social hierarchy were heavily influenced by his father, Walker Burford Freeman (1843-1935). The elder Freeman was a Confederate veteran and a member of the Army of Northern Virginia under General Robert E. Lee. During Douglas Southall Freeman’s childhood, his father provided didactic instruction in matters of religious faith and stressed the

historians” (John Lewis Gignilliat, *The Thought of Douglas Southall Freeman*, diss. University of Wisconsin, Madison (1968), 196). According to Johnson, Captain Basil Liddell Hart, a “British military analyst and author, wrote two negative reviews” of Freeman’s work, however the focus of his criticism was Robert E. Lee the man, not *Robert E. Lee: A Biography*. Freeman’s work was, according to Liddell Hart, “almost in a class by itself” (Johnson, 167-168). Of *Young Washington*, the first two volumes in Freeman’s biography of the first president, historian Allen Nevins wrote in the *New York Times* that the books were notable for their “exhaustive thoroughness,” however, he continued, that thoroughness “bears its penalty in an occasional stretch of exhausting detail” (Johnson, 306-307).

⁵ The seventh volume of *George Washington* was completed after Freeman’s death and was based on the research he had conducted. It was written by Mary Wells Ashworth and John Carroll (Johnson, 356).

⁶ Two books have been published since 2000 that consider Freeman’s life at length: a biography, *Douglas Southall Freeman*, by David E. Johnson (2002) and *Sustaining Southern Identity: Douglas Southall Freeman and Memory in the Modern South*, by Keith D. Dickson (2011). Two dissertations offer overviews of Freeman’s life: *The Thought of Douglas Southall Freeman*, by John Lewis Gignilliat, University of Wisconsin, and *Keeping the Faith: Douglas Southall Freeman, 1888-1953*, by John R. Peacock, III, Louisiana State University (1990), available at https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/5086. Stuart W. Smith included an introduction to Freeman’s life in his collection of Freeman’s speeches, *Douglas Southall Freeman on Leadership* (1990). Freeman’s entry in the *Encyclopedia Virginia* (Virginia Humanities) also offers a useful overview of his life and influence and was written by his biographer, David E. Johnson, https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Freeman_Douglas_Southall_1886-1953.

⁷ J. Douglas Smith, *Managing White Supremacy: Race, Politics and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press (2002), 3-4.

importance of education. Both also entwined with prevailing Victorian middle-class morality and the emerging tenants of what was already known as the Lost Cause. Historian Caroline E. Janney [describes the Lost Cause](#) as an ideology that “seeks to present the war, from the perspective of Confederates, in the best possible terms.”⁸ For the Freeman family and their ancestors, church attendance was a given, and for a time Freeman considered becoming a Baptist minister while a Ph.D. student at Johns Hopkins University. He internalized his father’s view of morality: an unwavering work ethic, adherence to tradition, honesty, frugality, and reverence for “great heroes” of the past.⁹ Douglas Southall Freeman was committed to upholding, and later spreading, these aspects of his father’s value structure. The Freeman family’s emphasis on character was synthesized with the uniquely Virginian devotion to what Douglas Southall Freeman called a “deliberate cult of the past.”¹⁰ In addition to advancing Lost Cause approaches to Virginia history and culture, he used his influence to elevate ideas of intelligence and good citizenship, believing these two qualities essential to successful leadership.

Freeman was deeply attached to the military and military leadership. He attempted to enlist in the Army during World War I and World War II but was rejected due to medical issues.¹¹ Instead, he found other ways of serving such as lecturing officers on military strategy and acting as a Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War for the State of Virginia.¹² His acumen as a military strategist was conveyed to his radio listeners through his descriptions and analysis of World War I and World War II battles. He was considered an expert in the field due to his knowledge of the Civil War strategies employed by Confederate leadership and for his ability to explain complicated wartime events in ways the general public could understand. Freeman also drew on the past when speaking to military audiences. Many of his speeches and lectures at the United States Army and Navy War Colleges emphasized the importance of what he viewed as Confederate officers’ leadership skills and their character qualities. Speaking at a 2001 celebration of the centennial of Freeman’s enrollment at Richmond College, David E. Johnson, author of *Douglas Southall Freeman (2002)*, described Freeman’s method of bridging contemporary military events and vivid descriptions of the past: “In his radio broadcasts and editorials, Freeman liked to help his audience put events in perspective by framing WWII battles in terms of Civil War conflicts, or likening European hamlets to familiar Virginia towns.”¹³

⁸ Caroline E. Janney, "The Lost Cause," *Encyclopedia Virginia*, Virginia Humanities, July 27, 2016. Web, accessed January 9, 2021, [link](#).

⁹ Douglas Southall Freeman, “Parables of the City Streets,” November 23, 1924, DSF Papers, Library of Congress, 10.

¹⁰ Keith D. Dickson, *Sustaining Southern Identity: Douglas Southall Freeman and Memory in the Modern South* (Making the Modern South), Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press (2011), 156.

¹¹ Johnson, 123 and 259.

¹² Telegram, November 17, 1927, DSF Papers, Torres. 1927-30, P-Sa, 13, AC. 10,634; 10,6 Folder Label: PI-PZ 36, Library of Congress.

¹³ *Henrico Citizen*, November 15, 2001, “Speaker Explores Legacy of Douglas Southall Freeman, 5, File:

Freeman was also a presidential advisor. He corresponded regularly with U.S. military leaders and during World War I President Woodrow Wilson stipulated that Freeman's editorials be placed on his desk in the Oval Office.¹⁴ As an expert on military history, Freeman had the ear not only of President Wilson but also that of General George C. Marshall, with whom he enjoyed extensive correspondence.¹⁵ Freeman helped create what was to become the Government Issue Bill, popularly known as the G.I. Bill, signed into effect by President Roosevelt in 1944. The G.I. Bill offered federal aid to help veterans adjust to civilian life, purchase homes, find employment and obtain an education. In 1942 Freeman proposed to Secretary of War Robert R. Patterson that if 18-year-old students were taken from college for military service, the government should promise to complete their training. Patterson agreed, endorsed the idea, and presented it to President Roosevelt who not only favored it but also made it possible for all veterans to receive an education.¹⁶

As one of the institutions most notable alumni, Douglas Southall Freeman served the University of Richmond as a trustee between 1925 and 1950 and provided leadership on the Executive Committee in various areas including investments, ancillary property management, and endowment growth. He also served as an advisor to institutional leaders. In addition, Freeman was involved in building projects, fundraising, and trustee nominations. As University Rector (1934-1950) he steered the institution through the Great Depression and World War II. Freeman defended the academic freedom of the faculty against an attack led by a local business leader in 1936.¹⁷ In his role as editor of the *Richmond News Leader*, Freeman used his position to advance the interests of the university and to raise its profile. After his death Freeman Hall was named in his honor and dedicated in 1965.

BACKGROUND AND EARLY INFLUENCES

Freeman, Douglas Southall A-T, VBHS.

¹⁴ David E. Johnson, *Douglas Southall Freeman*, Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing (2002), 10.

¹⁵ Johnson, 10.

¹⁶ Keith E. Eiler, *Mobilizing America: Robert P. Patterson and the War Effort, 1940-1945*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press (1997), 260; "Dr. Freeman Retires as Editor June 30 to Give Time to Historical Writing," *News Leader*, June 25, 1949, Biographical File, "Freeman, Douglas Southall A-T," VBHS. It is important to note that the G.I. Bill did not prove to be equally beneficial to Black and white veterans. A number of scholars have examined this history including Hilary Herbold in "Never a Level Playing Field: Blacks and the G.I. Bill," *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 6 (Winter 1994-1995), 104-108; Ira Katznelson and Suzanne Mettler, in "On Race and Policy History: A Dialogue About the G.I. Bill," *Perspectives on Politics* 6, no. 3, (September 2008), 519-537; and Sarah Turner and John Bound in "Closing the Gap or Widening the Divide: The Effects of the G.I. Bill and World War II on Educational Outcomes of Black Americans," *The Journal of Economic History*, 63, no. 1 (March 2003), 145-177. The subject has also been considered in the popular media, including Peter C. Baker's article, "The Tragic, Forgotten History of Black Military Veterans," *The New Yorker*, November 27, 2016, [link](#).

¹⁷ University of Richmond Trustee Records, 1936, reel MF-7-120; "Lewis F. Powell Soft-Pedals Out of Dilemma: Critic of University of Richmond's Radicalism Has Had Liberal Education," *Suffolk News-Herald*, May 28, 1936, Virginia Chronicle; W. Harrison Daniel, *History at the University of Richmond*, Print Shop: University of Richmond (1991), 167.

Freeman considered his father, Walker Burford Freeman, one of the three great influences of his youth. Pride of heritage and birthright is evident in the senior Freeman's memoirs and was amplified in his son's thinking.¹⁸ The power of ancestry and the idea of inheritable character traits is another theme Freeman repeatedly conveyed in his addresses, correspondence and editorials. The concept of strong and weak bloodlines dominated much of Douglas Southall Freeman's thinking. In a 1925 address, "The Safe Executor," given as part of his tremendously popular Men's Bible Study Class at Richmond's Second Baptist Church, Freeman stated,

Some of us are fortunate enough to receive from our parents that greatest inheritance — clean blood, right-thinking ancestry: some of us are unfortunate enough to have an inheritance which no matter what else it may or may not contain, is crossed all over with lust and mental dishonesty, and contains more of a liability than of asset.¹⁹

His thinking on the subject of "clean blood" and "right-thinking ancestry" was drawn from his father's priorities and informed Freeman's attitude toward to issues of race, intelligence, and [the eugenics movement in Virginia](#).²⁰

Walker Burford Freeman was a key figure in the memorialization of Confederate veterans and the public celebration of the history of the Civil War. By 1925, he became Commander of the United Confederate Veterans and in that position he continued to model an idealized view of the Confederacy and its leaders, who were venerated by white Southerners and by many in the country at large.²¹ Much of this reverence for the past was also manifested in the collective Southern memory that solidified during Douglas Southall Freeman's youth. Freeman was immersed in the minutiae of idealized Virginia memory as he listened to accounts of Confederate glory which exalted both the deeds and courage of soldiers and the perseverance of Southerners following defeat, both of which were viewed through a lens of the Lost Cause ideology by most white Southerners. Freeman's inculcation in these ideas of the past united with his family's dedication to Baptist doctrine. The young Freeman attended veteran reunions, joined those assembled for monument dedications, and witnessed Jefferson Davis' reinterment in Hollywood Cemetery, all at the side of his father. He was among the four thousand people who followed the Confederate

¹⁸ *Memoirs of Walker Burford Freeman, 1843-1935*, privately published and locally held by the University of Richmond (Rare Book Room) and the library at the Virginia Historical Society at the Virginia Museum of History and Culture.

¹⁹ DSF Papers, Articles, and Speeches, 1908-1925. 126 File: Series of Lectures, 1924-25 LOC AC.10,634; 10,660, 1-2.

²⁰ Eugenics was "the belief that genetic abnormalities were an important cause of various social problems, from low intelligence and shiftlessness to promiscuity, prostitution, and other more serious crimes" (Brendan Wolfe, "Buck v. Bell (1927)," *Encyclopedia Virginia*, Virginia Humanities, 4 Nov. 2015, [link](#). 10 Jan. 2021). Further, it argued that "humans can be selectively bred in similar ways to plants and animals" (Brendan Wolfe, "Racial Integrity Laws (1924-1930)," *Encyclopedia Virginia*, Virginia Humanities, November 4, 2015. [link](#)).

²¹ Johnson, 40.

president's casket from the train station to the cemetery.²² Douglas Southall Freeman's perspective was permanently fixed on the military heroes of Virginia's Confederate past and he retained a patriotic fealty to the South akin to religious faith.²³ Set against these Lost Cause perspectives, Victorian morality and birthright inheritance are the political and social views that Freeman later voiced as a renowned writer, radio broadcaster, and powerful influencer of public opinion.²⁴

EDUCATION

Freeman's key educational influences were John Peyton McGuire (1866-1948), instructor at the McGuire's University School for Boys in Richmond, and Dr. Samuel Chiles Mitchell, Professor of History at Richmond College and later the University of Richmond. The McGuire School was at the heart of "old Richmond," providing preparatory education to the sons of the city's elite.²⁵ J. Peyton McGuire taught a number of subjects but was particularly notable for "introducing the boys to the 'matchless glories of Shakespeare.'"²⁶ In 1948, Freeman wrote that McGuire "represented everything that was finest in our old educational ideals and in the life of Virginia manhood."²⁷

Freeman became a student at Richmond College at the age of fifteen and by his sophomore year had come under the considerable influence of Samuel Chiles Mitchell. David E. Johnson, Freeman's biographer, drew on the words of Freeman's eldest daughter, Mary Tyler Freeman Cheek McClenahan, in his summary of Mitchell's influence on her father: he was "'the man who above all others' would influence [Freeman's] intellectual development."²⁸ It was Mitchell who was instrumental in directing Freeman's attention to the formal study of history.²⁹ In addition to Mitchell's commitment to the Baptist church, Johnson also notes the professor's other similarities to Walker Burford Freeman, including his reverence for Robert E. Lee. While teaching, Mitchell "was

²² Johnson, 39; "His Eternal Sleep," *Richmond Dispatch*, June 1, 1893, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#).

²³ David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press (2003), 291.

²⁴ Six assertions are associated with Lost Cause interpretation: secession, not slavery, caused the Civil War; African Americans were "faithful slaves," unprepared for freedom and loyal to their masters; the Confederacy was overpowered by the Union's resources and numbers; Confederate soldiers were brave and saintly heroes; Robert E. Lee was the epitome of the Confederate soldier; and Southern white women were not only loyal to the confederacy but also sanctified by the sacrifice of their male relatives (Caroline E. Janney, "The Lost Cause," *Encyclopedia Virginia*, Virginia Humanities, 27 July 2016). See also Caroline Janney, *Burying the Dead but Not the Past: Ladies' Memorial Association and the Lost Cause*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press (2008).

²⁵ John Lewis Gignilliat, *The Thought of Douglas Southall Freeman*, diss. University of Wisconsin, Madison (1968), 89, 86.

²⁶ Johnson, 41.

²⁷ Johnson, 41.

²⁸ Johnson, 49.

²⁹ "Freeman Hall Named for Former Messenger Editor," [University of Richmond] *Collegian*, April 13, 1978.

often overcome with emotion when he delivered an address about the general.”³⁰ While a student at Richmond College, Freeman participated in a number of extracurricular activities. He was the editor of the student-run literary magazine, *The Messenger*, was a member of the Phi Gamma Delta Fraternity, and was active in the Dramatic Club.³¹ After three years as an undergraduate, in 1904, at eighteen years of age, Freeman graduated from Richmond College with an AB degree (now BA).

GRADUATE SCHOOL

After graduating from Richmond College, Freeman left for Baltimore, Maryland, where he pursued a Ph.D. in history at Johns Hopkins University, joining his older brother, Allen Weir Freeman, who was completing his final year of medical school at the university. Douglas Southall Freeman’s dissertation, *The Attitude of Political Parties in Virginia to Slavery and Secession, 1846-1861*, was built on a Lost Cause understanding of the necessity of Southern secession in the face of “the Federal policy of coercion.” He wrote that the “unanimity” of the Virginia political response to the “policy of Lincoln” – likely what Freeman had already referred to as “the slavery question” – meant that secession was the only possible course of action for the state.³² In a letter to his father, Freeman wrote of his ambition to tell the story of the Confederate Army: “to write that story of our country, that story of the causes that led up to those four dark years of war, which changed the whole tenor of our nation, and made it a nation, where before we were only a confederation.”³³ As was the case with many white Virginians of the time, Freeman described his thoughts on enslavement in terms of regional traditions and, in the case of Virginia, argued that those enslaved there were better treated than elsewhere in the South. He viewed antebellum white Southerners as victims of the institution of slavery. In a 1920 *News Leader* editorial, Freeman wrote that historically “slavery was not of Virginia’s seeking,” but required by “the crown”³⁴ and in his work, *The South to Posterity: An Introduction to the Writing of Confederate History*, Freeman did not include slavery as a factor of secession.³⁵ Both were beliefs that aligned with Lost Cause absolution of Virginia’s leadership role in slavery and the conviction that enslavement was not the cause of secession. Caroline E. Janney distills this belief, writing, “Lost Cause proponents have stressed the primacy of states’ rights and the constitutionality of secession, and have cited the secession crisis—along with political squabbles such as tariff disputes and broad claims about the evolution of different societies in the North and

³⁰ Johnson, 46-49.

³¹ Johnson, 54. See University of Richmond, *The Spider*, volume 5, 1905, [link](#).

³² DSF, “Ph.D. Dissertation, Second Copy,” Box 126, DSF Papers, LOC; Gignilliat, *Thought of Douglas Southall Freeman*, 139, citing a letter from DSF to WBF, March 10, 1907. Freeman chose not to reconstruct his dissertation after it was destroyed in a fire in September of 1908. Remnants are housed at the Library of Congress with Freeman’s papers.

³³ Douglas Southall Freeman to Walker Burford Freeman quoted in John R. Peacock, III, *Keeping the Faith: Douglas Southall Freeman, 1886-1953*, Vol. 1 and II, dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1990.

³⁴ DSF, “Virginia Anti-slavery Acts,” RNL, October 7, 1920, LOV.

³⁵ Douglas Southall Freeman, *The South to Posterity: An Introduction to the Writing of Confederate History*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press (1998), 202-203.

South—as the cause of the war instead of slavery.”³⁶ According to Gary W. Gallaher, who wrote the introduction to the 1998 version of *The South to Posterity*, “none of Freeman’s witnesses would mention a desire to protect a social system based on slavery,” but instead, Freeman found logic in secession born of state’s rights and believed Southerners “fought bravely and fairly.”³⁷

After graduating from Johns Hopkins, Freeman returned to Richmond where he lived for the rest of his life. He married Inez Virginia Goddin in 1914 and they had three children: Mary Tyler Freeman Cheek McClenahan, Anne Ballard Freeman Turpin, and James Douglas Freeman.

FREEMAN AND THE *RICHMOND NEWS LEADER*

In 1915, at the age of 29, Freeman became the editor of the *Richmond News Leader*, one of the two major daily publications in the city. The *News Leader*, an afternoon newspaper, was read widely across the region and was often excerpted in publications in other parts of the country.³⁸ In January 1930, the newspaper reached 73,265 readers.³⁹ His position as editor gave Freeman a unique hold on the public mind. He determined each edition’s news emphasis and wrote up to seven editorials per day. During World War I, his editorials related to ending neutrality were passed to President Wilson prior to the United States’ entry into World War I.⁴⁰ His twice-daily radio broadcasts from WRVA, then the *News Leader’s* radio outlet, WRNL, were heard by eager listeners who felt he was speaking directly to them.⁴¹ In *Douglas Southall Freeman*, David E. Johnson quotes historian Richard Harwell writing that “Freeman’s broadcasts were ‘an essential of the Virginian breakfast.’”⁴² One dedicated listener remembered that Freeman “explained the news.” Her description also provided a window into the influence Freeman had on the thinking of his listeners regarding international events: “[t]o the average Virginian, unsophisticated in world affairs, he was indispensable.”⁴³

³⁶ Janney, “The Lost Cause,” *Encyclopedia Virginia*.

³⁷ Gary W. Gallaher in Freeman, *The South to Posterity*, xxiii.

³⁸ “Heavy Sleeper Reports on Virginia Coastal Storm,” *Chapel Hill Weekly*, September 01, 1933, *Chronicling America*.

³⁹ [Circulation], RNL, January 7, 1930, LOV.

⁴⁰ Johnson, 115-16. Among these influential *News Leader* editorials are “Why No Little Germany” (January 8, 1916) and “Balkan Campaign Taking Form” (September 19, 1916), both available at the Library of Virginia.

⁴¹ A WRNL station survey included in *The Radio Annual 1940* revealed that the station then reached a primary audience of 735,000 and 125,900 “radio homes.” Its secondary audience was 915,000 and 640,000 “radio homes” (Jack Alicote, ed. *The Radio Annual 1940*, The Radio Daily (1940), 544, Library of Congress and the Internet Archive, [link](#)). Here “secondary” indicates some limited listening due to interference from other signals. According to Johnson, Freeman’s radio program was “estimated” to have “reached 63 percent of the listening audience,” and Freeman “continued the pace of thirteen broadcasts a week until his death” (Johnson, 148).

⁴² Johnson, 220.

⁴³ *Virginia Cavalcade*, 46:247.

Freeman's editorial stances on issues including lynching, judicial equality, and police violence, would at times earn praise from those in the Black community, including John Mitchell, Jr., the editor of the *Richmond Planet*.⁴⁴ Freeman's stance on segregation and racial equality, however, were regularly challenged by Mitchell. Freeman's opinions on a wide array of policies, including those focused on race, were rarely questioned by white people. In the decades between 1920 and 1950, the Jim Crow era, many of Freeman's editorials focused on aspects of white paternal identity. His editorials perpetuated racial inequality and diminished and discouraged the voting power of Black people.

RACISM

As the structures of racial separation solidified in the 1920s, Freeman's aversion to racial intermarriage and sexual relationships led to his association with and support for key figures in Virginia's eugenics movement and the rising Anglo-Saxon identity movement. To Freeman, sexual relationships between those of different races risked "pollutions of blood" and his long-standing beliefs about the benefits of racial purity were articulated in a number of editorials.⁴⁵ Like many socially prominent white Virginians in the early 20th century, Freeman held himself above the actions of the Ku Klux Klan while at times still approving of the structures of white supremacy at the core of the organization. In August of 1919, after both the *News Leader* and the Associated Press investigated a group that the AP described as "an organization fashioned after the Ku Klux Klan," Freeman dismissed concerns raised by Richmond's African American community, writing that the organization was a "fraternal" one and "does not represent the slightest threat to any law-abiding Negro or to any other citizen." Freeman continued that the *News Leader* "should certainly call on the corporation commission" to revoke the group's charter if the organization ever did present a threat, but "we regard such a contingency...as remote in the extreme, because the membership of the order as anyone can ascertain is made of men whom every reputable citizen would be willing to trust."⁴⁶ John Mitchell, Jr. of the *Planet* used the Associated Press findings to challenge Freeman firing back, "We do not believe that a race riot will take place in this city, but it may be well to have all of these matters brought to public notice before they occur. It may save lives on both sides and prevent much bloodshed."⁴⁷ Mitchell expressed the deep concerns felt by African Americans across the country as domestic terrorism reigned in the form of race riots. Between 1898 and 1919 large-scale group violence by white rioters against Black people and their property had occurred in numerous cities, resulting in lynchings and terrorization: Wilmington, North Carolina, 1898;

⁴⁴ Anne McCreery, Errol Somay and the *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*. "John Mitchell Jr. (1863–1929)," *Encyclopedia Virginia*, Virginia Humanities, May 6 2019, [link](#).

⁴⁵ DSF, "The Price of Pollution", RNL, June 5, 1923, LOV.

⁴⁶ DSF, "No Washington-Chicago Man Hunts," RNL, July 29, 1919, LOV; reprinted in "The Situation Here," *Richmond Planet*, August 2, 1919, Virginia Chronicle, [link](#).

⁴⁷ [John Mitchell, Jr.], "The Situation Here," *Richmond Planet*, August 2, 1919, Virginia Chronicle.

Phoenix, South Carolina, 1898; Atlanta, Georgia, 1906; Springfield, Illinois, 1908; East St. Louis, Illinois, 1917; Houston, Texas, 1917; Elaine, Arkansas; 1919; and Chicago, Illinois, 1919.⁴⁸

In 1920, when a suspicious organization called the American Civic Association was in the news Freeman addressed the group's apparent ties to the KKK and he worked to have their permit for assembly denied. In a private letter from Freeman to his friend, mentor, and *News Leader* owner John Stewart Bryan, Freeman wrote, "I thank God that we had a chance, apparently, to smash an organization that stinks to high heaven."⁴⁹ Five months later an advertisement for the "Knights of the Ku Klux Klan" was published in the *News Leader*. After apparent outcry, Freeman published an editorial expressing regret over its inclusion in the pages of the newspaper. Freeman's apology also expressed a general approval of Klan principles: "The *News Leader* may be in full sympathy with them." Freeman did make it clear that the Klan's methods of "terrorization and mystery" were "no longer" useful as "solutions of the problems in the South." He wrote, "Instead of mystery[,] open council is needed. Instead of terrorization, education."⁵⁰ John Mitchell, Jr. of the *Richmond Planet* included clippings of both the image of the precipitating advertisement and Freeman's *News Leader* response on his own editorial page and wrote, "We note with infinite satisfaction and the greatest of pleasure the attitude of the Richmond, Va. News Leader in dealing with the Ku Klux Klan organization. It states plainly that the advertising patronage of this secret body of men is not wanted. This is the only proper course to take in dealing with this sinister organization." Mitchell did not address Freeman's opinion of the "constructive" KKK "principles" but instead focused on a unified response among "a better class of white and colored people" whom he described as being "of one mind" about the group. He then called for them to work together to "heal the wounds that this and other wars have made."⁵¹



"Much Is In A Name," from the *News Leader* reprinted in the *Richmond Planet*, November 27, 1920

Two years after the Klan advertisement appeared in the *News Leader*, Freeman's editorials featured another group committed to "racial integrity," the Anglo-Saxon Clubs of America. He wrote approvingly of the organization's principles and strategies in the editorial, "The Price of Pollution," stating that "the clubs insist on proper laws against miscegenation and seek to insure [sic] the

⁴⁸ Walter C. Rucker and James N. Upton, eds., *Encyclopedia of Race Riots*, Vol. I, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press (2007), 310.

⁴⁹ Johnson, 138.

⁵⁰ DSF, "Is This the Ku Klux Klan?" RNL, June 30, 1921, LOV; Johnson, 138; DSF, "Much is in a Name," RNL, November 16, 1920, LOV.

⁵¹ Reprint of "Much Is In A Name," from the *News Leader* in the *Richmond Planet*, November 27, 1920, *Virginia Chronicle*, [link](#); [John Mitchell, Jr.], "The Ku Klux Klan," *Richmond Planet*, November 27, 1920, *Virginia Chronicle*.

registration by race of all persons now living” in an effort to maintain “racial purity, racial integrity and lofty racial ideals.” Freeman felt the clubs would need to convince and enlist white people rather than relying on legislation to reach their goals because “laws can be evaded sometimes or defied.” Freeman’s prevailing concern was what he believed to be the inherent vulnerability of Anglo-Saxon power given that it both “spread itself throughout the world,” and he argued that it also allowed itself to be diluted through intermarriage.⁵² Freeman’s views were not as extreme as those held by Virginia white supremacy activists such as John Powell, Earnest Cox, and Walter Plecker, founders of the Anglo-Saxon Clubs of America.⁵³ [The Racial Bills of 1924-1930](#), designed to protect what their advocates saw as the integrity of the white race dominated Virginia political debate and were ultimately added to the state constitution. An example of Freeman’s modulation appeared in the 1926 editorial, “Not the Virginia Way.” In it, Freeman carved out an exception for what he termed “foreign students” meaning those from Asia. He argued that these students should not be categorized as “non-white” or “colored” as these labels would harm both college admissions and foreign religious missions. Although he advocated for separate but equal education facilities for Black people, he believed students from Asia should be allowed to attend school with whites. He did not believe they should be considered in the same category as Black people.⁵⁴ As noted by historian Pippa Holloway, Freeman’s objections echoed “[a] key element of the criticism of the Public Assemblages Act” and the *Richmond News Leader* “expressed concern that news would travel abroad that Virginians discriminated against Asians.”⁵⁵ As Freeman had written in the 1923 editorial, “The Price of Pollution,” in his later editorial “Not the Virginia Way,” he questioned the advantages of racial legislation: “Virginia has her racial sore spots that call for treatment — careful, intelligent and in some instances drastic treatment — but on the whole she has attained very satisfactory results by avoiding needless racial law-making, and by applying her own methods of adjustment in her own way... Public sentiment can be trusted now, as always, to find the best Virginia Way.”⁵⁶

Freeman rarely, if ever, equivocated in his stances. He would, however, urge moderation in the application of such stances and did have an aversion to what he saw as radical responses to many issues. In his 1926 editorial, “The Racial Bills” he called for a two-year delay in the enactment of pending racial laws to prevent a hurried process because he believed “all Virginians are so completely of one mind on this point” that they could engage in “frank discussions of the best means of having the white and the colored people live harmoniously, but separately.” Despite his seeming reticence to advocate for legislation, Freeman did not hesitate to share his recommendations. In his opinion, laws against intermarriage were a “necessity” and separation on streetcars, railways and other forms of public accommodations was essential to prevent what he saw

⁵² DSF, “The Price of Pollution,” RNL, June 5, 1923, LOV.

⁵³ John Cofer Landon, “The Plea for Racial Integrity: A History of the Anglo-Saxon Clubs of America,” thesis, Corcoran Department of History, University of Virginia (1978), 9-35.

⁵⁴ DSF, “Not the Virginia Way,” RNL, February 9, 1926, LOV.

⁵⁵ Pippa Holloway, *Sexuality, Politics, and Social Control in Virginia, 1920-1945*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press (2006), 41.

⁵⁶ DSF, “Not the Virginia Way,” RNL, February 9, 1926, LOV.

as racial “friction.” Freeman reversed his call for delayed voting on the Racial Integrity Bill of 1926 after an exception was added to protect prominent Virginia families claiming both white and indigenous ancestors.⁵⁷

EUGENICS

At the core of Freeman’s views on race was the concept of “clean blood.” In several editorials between the years 1924 and 1925, Freeman promoted the concept of genetics determining intelligence, social and cultural station, and health and mentality by summarizing for his readers the findings of eugenicists such as Dr. Arthur Estabrook and Dr. Walter Plecker. He shared with members of his *News Leader* Current Events Class his support of the involuntary sterilization measure of 1924 for its “beneficent effects.”⁵⁸ Freeman’s views were part of an international eugenics movement led by a group of scientists and writers who targeted people of color around the world as well as, in the words of Dr. Arthur Estabrook, “low grade white” people. Eugenicists sought to control birth rates in populations deemed deficient by using scientific language that emphasized racial differences and their beliefs in racial inferiority and superiority. Contemporary awareness of the eugenics movement in Virginia is largely centered on involuntary sterilization and [the 1927 Supreme Court case of *Buck v. Bell*](#). While Freeman’s period of influence on the subject preceded this case, his written admonitions primed the public for an acceptance of eugenics’ principles.⁵⁹ Like other newspaper editors in Virginia, Freeman provided publicly disseminated content which promoted eugenic arguments. His editorials included his opinions on “feeble-mindedness” and focused on the reproduction rates of the lower classes as a threat to Virginia’s economy.⁶⁰ According to historian Pippa Holloway in *Sexuality, Politics, and Social Control in Virginia 1920-1945*, many elite Virginians believed that “[l]ower-class whites might undermine the social order, damage the economy by reproducing inferior genes, and undermine the white race by giving birth to mixed race offspring.” Holloway continues, “White elites, the governing class whose wisdom brought them to support eugenics, would protect the state. Thus, eugenics in Virginia reaffirmed the rights of certain white men to rule other whites.”⁶¹ Freeman’s editorials on the

⁵⁷ DSF, “The Bill ‘As Is’ and ‘As Was,’” RNL, March 2, 1926, LOV. This clause was commonly known as the “Pocahontas Exception.”

⁵⁸ Smith, *Managing White Supremacy: Race, Politics, and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press (2002), 81; quote from DSF Papers, Minutes, News Leader Current Events Class March 10, 1924, Folder “1923 Ap-Dc and 1924,” box 177, LC.

⁵⁹ See J. Douglas Smith, “The Campaign for Racial Purity and the Erosion of Paternalism in Virginia, 1922-1930: ‘Nominally White, Biologically Mixed, and Legally Negro,’” *Journal of Southern History* 68, no. 1 (February 2002), 65-106; DSF Papers, Minutes, News Leader Current Events class, March 10, 1924, Folder “1923 Ap-Dc and 1924” Box 177, LC; Gregory Michael Dorr, *Segregation’s Science: Eugenics and Society in Virginia*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press (2008).

⁶⁰ DSF, “The Report on the Feeble-Minded,” RNL, October 2, 1915 and DSF, “Who Had the Big Families,” RNL, January 5, 1925, LOV.

⁶¹ Holloway, *Sexuality, Politics, and Social Control in Virginia*, 50.

subject of eugenics molded and amplified the opinions of educated, affluent whites throughout the Commonwealth.

In an editorial on the subject of gene determination, Freeman lauded the expertise of Dr. Arthur Estabrook who had written a paper critical of racial mixing among Black, indigenous and “low grade” white people living in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. The editorial quoted liberally from Estabrook’s findings and communicated Freeman’s fear of the moral and health consequences of interracial reproduction on future generations of the white race.⁶² Freeman’s enthusiasm for targeted birth control was linked to his conviction that, “the more ignorant the parents, the more children they are apt to bring into the world.”⁶³ In another editorial, “The New Family,” Freeman wrote in full-throated support of the eugenics movement’s aims, stopping what he called the “great stream of defective and dependent in our population...insuring [sic] the permanence and the improvement even of the moral and physical standards of the human race.”⁶⁴ Freeman’s advocacy for sterilization — which linked to his pre-existing belief in the supremacy of Anglo-Saxon people — resulted in his promotion of the finer points of eugenics. Throughout his life, Freeman remained a vocal opponent of interracial marriage and interracial sexual relationships. This antipathy represented the wide-held white fear that “if racially mixed individuals dominated Virginia’s population, higher civilization would be destroyed and the state ruined.”⁶⁵ He described the need to preserve what he often called the “integrity,” of the white race as a “biological caution.” He wrote, “a white man is guided by the same impulse that keeps the robin from mating with the starling” an instinct that Freeman believed illustrated “the southern point of view.”⁶⁶

In his 1924 editorial, “The Rhinelander Tragedy,” Freeman recounted what he considered to be the social ruin of a wealthy white man who unknowingly married a woman whom Freeman described as “having negro blood in her veins.” He suggested the woman was “calculating” and a “wretched girl” who had deceived Rhinelander. Freeman framed the situation as a biological and social horror story, writing, “In an evening a boy may take a handicap under which he must stagger to the end of his days. No man can defy social usage, the custom of the tribe, and fail to pay the price.” He further noted, “the certainty, not less than the horror of the outcome has inspired such efforts as that represented in the Virginia ‘racial purity law’ to make marriages between whites and persons of colored extraction impossible.” He relayed this story to his readers as a cautionary tale, imploring them to determine the race of prospective partners prior to marriage and, thus, avoid the “reckless” and “impetuous” actions of Rhinelander.⁶⁷

⁶² DSF, “The Mixed Group,” RNL, November 24, 1924, LOV.

⁶³ DSF, “Who Had the Big Families,” RNL, January 5, 1925, LOV.

⁶⁴ DSF, “The New Family,” RNL, February 4, 1925, LOV.

⁶⁵ Holloway, *Sexuality, Politics, and Social Control in Virginia*, 33.

⁶⁶ Johnson, 192-194.

⁶⁷ DSF, “The Rhinelander Tragedy,” RNL, November 1, 1924, LOV.

RACIAL INEQUALITY

In Freeman's view, typical of the paternalism shared by many white Virginians at the time, stability and good will between the races rested on a transactional relationship: Black Virginians were to play their role as, in Freeman's words, "the best Negroes in America" in exchange for continued white patronage, provision of services, and infrastructural improvements.⁶⁸ Freeman often appealed to his readers for donations directed at the Black community which funded the construction of playgrounds, shelters for displaced Black women, and efforts to eradicate tuberculosis through education.⁶⁹ In an early 20th century address to a largely Black audience, Freeman admonished them to do a better job seeking health information and noted the racial disparities in rates of tuberculosis and other diseases. In a rare show of public Black resistance to Freeman's authority, [activist Thomas C. Walker](#) challenged Freeman's shaming of the audience by sharing his own treatment at the hands of a dismissive and racist public health worker at the Board of Health office when he had attempted to pick up the "excellent leaflets and pamphlets on health subjects" that Freeman was touting. In his memoir Walker recalled saying to Freeman, "When Negro mortality went down it would be because the manners of white health workers has gone up."⁷⁰

Freeman believed in achieving a "desirable" and "practicable" residential racial separation in Richmond without legislation. In a 1930 editorial, "Separation by Consent," he drew on his paternalistic conviction that he fully understood the needs of both Black and white citizens: "The Negro loves companionship and can never be at ease when living close to people who resent his presence in their neighborhood." He proposed a plan to implement what he referred to as "separation by consent."⁷¹ As Freeman saw it, in exchange for basic services and some limited access to residential opportunities, African Americans would agree to remain in separate designated neighborhoods:

If separation by consent is to be a reality, it must provide at least these three things: First, the city must supply the Negro districts with as good streets as the average white neighborhoods of the same relative valuation have, and the city must give to homes on these streets the same service in street-cleaning, waste removal and the like that the rest of the city enjoys. Secondly, there must be some outlet into better homes for those Negroes who have the means and the ambition to rise above the crowded squalor of dilapidated shacks in old Jackson Ward. This outlet is to be found either through the transfer to Negroes of neighborhoods from which whites move, or through the opening of new districts for Negro home-owners. Finally, separation by consent depends for its smooth operation on the

⁶⁸ DSF, "For Better Negro Schools," RNL, March 3, 1924, LOV.

⁶⁹ DSF, "Will You Help These Playgrounds?" RNL, June 2, 1923, LOV; DSF, "For the Colored Girls Home," RNL, June 28, 1920, LOV; DSF, "Help Them," RNL, March 27, 1915, LOV.

⁷⁰ Clayton McLure Brooks, *The Uplift Generation: Cooperation Across the Color Line in Early Twentieth-Century Virginia*, University of Virginia Press (2017), 76-77.

⁷¹ DSF, "Separation by Consent," RNL, May 20, 1930, LOV.

establishment of some unofficial agency that will handle amicably the situations that arise when the white people begin to leave a street and Negroes move in.⁷²

Nearly two decades later, in response to President Truman's Committee on Civil Rights and the group's landmark report, *To Secure These Rights*, which proposed several areas to confront discrimination directly, Freeman termed the report "unrealistic in application" and "meaningless, because it deals with questions which, fundamentally, are beyond the reach of law." He contended that the recommendations of the committee should instead be left to the "slow and unpredictable operation of time."⁷³

LYNCHING AND OTHER FORMS OF GROUP VIOLENCE

In 1926, three events, one of them the lynching of a Black man, prompted Freeman to speak out against mob-violence and vigilantism. While Freeman did not believe in social equality between white and Black people, at times his belief in equality under the criminal justice system was in evidence. This was particularly true in his response to the three cases that all occurred in Virginia: the lynching of a Black man, the kidnapping and mob interrogation of a Catholic priest, and the kidnapping and whipping of two women of unknown race for "moral transgressions."⁷⁴

In August 1926, Raymond Bird, a Black man who had been arrested in Wytheville, Virginia after having been accused of raping a white woman, was killed by a mob. Two weeks later, in another part of the state, at least twenty-eight "masked and white-robed men" kidnapped a Catholic priest and interrogated him for leading a youth band made up of Black children.⁷⁵ The following day, in Bristol, Virginia, two women were kidnapped, "driven into the country to an abandoned house" and were "whipped... with leather straps."⁷⁶

⁷² DSF, "Separation by Consent," RNL, May 20, 1930, LOV. Freeman's characterization of the "Old Jackson Ward" neighborhood as "dilapidated shacks" must be viewed in the context of the neighborhood's history as a vibrant center of Black art, economic innovation, and cultural importance. See Bowen, Dawn S. "The Transformation of Richmond's Historic African American Commercial Corridor," *Southeastern Geographer* 43, no. 2 (2003): 260-78. Accessed January 21, 2021, [link](#). For information on the "redlining" of Richmond's neighborhoods, see the University of Richmond Digital Engagement Team's *Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America*, [link](#).

⁷³ DSF, "The Report on Civil Rights," *Richmond News Leader*, October 30, 1947, Library of Virginia. The report, *To Secure These Rights: The Report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights*, proposed to establish a permanent Civil Rights Commission, a Joint Congressional Committee on Civil Rights and a Civil Rights Division in the Department of Justice. Additionally, the report recommended establishing federal protection from lynching; establishing a permanent fair employment practice commission; and the abolishment of poll taxes.

⁷⁴ Alexander S. Leidholdt, *Editor for Justice: The Life of Louis I. Jaffee*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press (2002), 188.

⁷⁵ "To Aid Abducted Priest, Liberties Union Denounces Virginia Sheriff for Failure to Act," *New York Times*, September 7, 1926.

⁷⁶ DSF, "This Is Not Like Virginia," RNL, September 4, 1926, LOV.

Freeman wrote three editorials in response to the incidents. In one, “This Is Not Like Virginia,” he expressed his outrage that Virginians would participate in a lynching and other forms of group violence. He wrote that these acts represented “the same state of mind – hate, contempt for the processes of law, a determination to take private vengeance and to substitute the mob for the court.” He wrote that the crimes “sound like rural Georgia or inland Texas in the most lawless days of anti-negro, anti-Catholic agitation. Coming close together, and almost without precedent in some of their details, this trio of outrages is enough to make every right-minded Virginian wonder what has come over a people who used to boast their respect for the law and their sense of fair play.” This editorial concluded with a plea for a return to what Freeman believed was the typical sanity, honor and tolerance of Virginia. In his final paragraph he asked if “Virginians so far forgotten the struggle and the victory that they are prepared to deny others what their great-grandfathers accounted the most notable fruit of the revolution?”⁷⁷

⁷⁷ DSF, “This Is Not Like Virginia,” RNL, September 4, 1926, LOV. For more information on lynching in Virginia, see *Racial Terror: Lynching in Virginia*, James Madison University, [link](#); History of Lynching in Virginia Work Group, “History of Lynching in Virginia, The Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission, [link](#); Commonwealth of Virginia, General Assembly, Senate of Virginia, “S. Res. 36: Apologizing to the victims of lynching and the descendants of those victims for the failure of the Senate to enact anti-lynching legislation,” (2005), [link](#).

RACIAL SEGREGATION IN EDUCATION

On the subject of education, Freeman advocated for separate but equal educational systems and facilities for Black students. In editorials he wrote between 1936 and 1942, Freeman challenged his readers to acknowledge that the separate schools were far from “equal,” and calling them such was a “legal fiction.” Unless his white readers prioritized funding for adequate school facilities for Black students, they must prepare themselves for court cases demanding the enrollment of Black students in white schools. He also described such investments in schools as a way to prevent the cost of jail construction in the future.⁷⁸ Freeman urged his readers to “remind the [city] council that if Richmond permits the matter to drag along indefinitely, she may expect the Negroes to go into court. They will demand before a federal judge that Negro children be admitted to John Marshall and to Thomas Jefferson [both white-only Richmond high schools], or else that the city provide equal facilities within the just meaning of the words.”⁷⁹

Freeman also articulated his position on educational segregation in higher education. A 1925 incident, resulting in a public scandal, involved an interracial audience at Hampton Institute (now Hampton University) and ultimately led to the General Assembly passing the Public Assemblages Act of 1926. In response to the controversy, Freeman wrote, “To preserve the sympathy and loyalty of Southern whites, the Hampton school must avoid every semblance of the practice of racial equality” which “unsettles the negro’s point of view and ...moves the white race’s deepest emotions.”⁸⁰ In his Current Events Class, Freeman shared his belief that unless Hampton Institute complied with strict segregation, the loss of white good will would erode support for the institution.⁸¹ In other words, in order for the school to maintain the approval of the white community administrators and students must adhere to separation of the races.

Virginia.
Dear President Boatwright:
The enclosed letter and protest of some of the students reached me yesterday. I have written the prime mover, Mr. Rhodenbiser that I would lay this before the executive committee and would communicate with him further either directly or through you. I included a reminder that administrative matters were in your hands.
Of course you doubtless will wish to bring this interesting and unusual communication before the executive committee. Evidently it will be quite a letter to answer--an instance of damned if we do and damned if we don't.
Faithfully yours,

Freeman to Boatwright, March 18, 1944
(Papers of Frederic W. Boatwright,
Boatwright Library, University of Richmond
and compiled by Race & Racism at the
University of Richmond)

In March 1944, while Rector of the University of Richmond, Freeman actively supported President Frederic W. Boatwright’s handling of student complaints regarding the exclusion of a Black visiting speaker, Russell Jones, from the dining hall. Freeman wrote to Boatwright describing the administrators as being in a challenging situation, “an instance of damned if we do and damned if we don’t.”⁸² The university’s official response, conveyed in an open letter from Boatwright to students, reminded them that Jones’ treatment was “according

⁷⁸ DSF, “Equal School Facilities,” RNL, September 25, 1942; DSF, “The City Must Choose,” RNL, June 25, 1936, LOV.

⁷⁹ DSF, “The City Must Choose,” RNL, June 25, 1936; DSF, “Equal School Facilities,” RNL, September 25, 1942, LOV.

⁸⁰ DSF “The South Looks to Dr. Gregg,” RNL, July 15, 1925, LOV.

⁸¹ Smith, *Managing White Supremacy*, 119.

⁸² DSF, “Dear President Boatwright,” March 18, 1944, Boatwright Memorial Library, Presidential Correspondence of Frederic W. Boatwright, 1910-1946. <http://dlxs.richmond.edu/cgi/i/image/image->

to well established custom in this region.”⁸³ A search of the records of the University of Richmond Board of Trustees and the Executive Committee has not revealed any record of a discussion of the controversy.

During the Truman administration, the 1947 President’s Commission on Higher Education issued a report advocating policy reform to allow for integration of colleges and universities. Freeman was one of four members of the commission to sign a letter of dissent. He and other signatories recognized the “gross inequality of opportunity, economic and educational,” for Black students and agreed that “conditions should be improved, inequalities removed, and greater opportunity provided for all our people.” However, Freeman and the cosigners of the dissent letter argued the work of the commission would actually delay improvement, a common argument in the South. “We believe,” Freeman and the dissenters wrote, “that pronouncements such as those of the Commission on the question of segregation jeopardize these efforts, impede progress, and threaten tragedy to the people of the south, both white and Negro.” The recommendations, they insisted, “ignore the facts of history and the realities of the present.”⁸⁴

VOTING RIGHTS

During Freeman’s youth, Virginia almost entirely disenfranchised Black voters through the implementation of poll taxes and literacy tests. Freeman believed this constraint also resulted in low white voter turnout because of the overly complicated franchise regulations instituted in 1902 which was intended to disenfranchise Black voters. While Freeman argued against the restrictions, his exasperation focused on the need to ease the voting process for white Virginians not bringing more Black voters into the franchise. His attention to voter education within prescribed limits of class and race was illustrated in the editorial, “The Negro Question,” in which Freeman described the struggle to regain white control of Virginia after Reconstruction as “elemental” and “biological.” He reminded his readers that although “Virginia negroes are the best in America — the most trustworthy, the most reliable,” he believed that “they are not capable of operating the government of state, of city or of county.” He concluded the editorial by stating, “the biological consideration...is paramount to the political.”⁸⁵

The fear of potential Black voter dominance was especially troubling to Freeman when he considered the power of African American women as a voting bloc. He detailed his concern in his

[idx?id=S-FWB-X-0005152%5DFWB6043.1944.034.001.JP2](https://www.libraryofvirginia.org/record?id=S-FWB-X-0005152%5DFWB6043.1944.034.001.JP2)

⁸³ DSF, “The South Looks to Dr. Gregg,” RNL, July 15, 1925, Library of Virginia.; Smith, *Managing White Supremacy*, 119; DSF, “Dear President Boatwright,” March 18, 1944, Boatwright Memorial Library, Presidential Correspondence of Fredric W. Boatwright, 1910-1946. *The Collegian*, Open Letter, April 14, 1944.

⁸⁴ Richmond C. Beatty, “The Truman Report on Higher Education,” *The Georgia Review*, Vol. 2, no. 3 (Fall 1948), pp. 362-372; VBHS, RG6.2.4 Box 76 Folder Title: Documents [US] Commission on Higher Education and Statement of Dissent as Regards Racial Segregation signed by Douglas Southall Freeman Commission Dissent, undated.

⁸⁵ DSF, “The Negro Question,” RNL, September 14, 1920, LOV

September 18, 1920 editorial, “Offsetting White Men’s Votes.” For Freeman, Black women possessed a “disquieting” voting power which would lower the margin “by which the white population controls the government of the South.” He called upon white women to qualify in significant enough numbers to ensure that the “civilization of the South” would not be endangered. Anti-suffragists were also urged to register so that “their husband’s vote will not be offset by that of some negro woman.”⁸⁶

His 1920 series of editorials, *Intelligent Suffrage*, was published when the 19th Amendment was ratified in Tennessee. Freeman sought to educate new women voters about the intricacies of governance. His tone and subject matter indicate that he viewed his audience as primarily white women, and he hoped that they would cast their vote in the best interest of the white South. By 1927, Freeman no longer feared “negro domination in Virginia” due to a declining Black population and confidence that “the counties know best how to deal with the negroes in areas where they outnumbered whites.”⁸⁷ As late as 1949, Freeman believed the proposed repeal of poll taxes in the South was a sign of “impending Federal domination of local affairs” and considered removal of franchise requirements to herald far reaching consequences. “Concealed in the anti-poll tax bill,” he wrote, “is a legal weapon that could destroy our system of government and the local supervision of elections. If the bill passes, something of America will pass with it.”⁸⁸

⁸⁶ DSF, “Offsetting White Men’s Votes,” RNL, September 18, 1920, LOV.

⁸⁷ DSF, “Virginia Does Not Know The Price She Pays,” RNL, April 5, 1927, LOV.

⁸⁸ DSF, “After the Poll Tax,” RNL, June 21, 1949, LOV.

FREEMAN AS A UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND ADMINISTRATOR

Freeman served as Trustee and later Rector of the University of Richmond Board of Trustees from 1925 to 1950. As rector, Freeman was involved in daily decisions necessary to the operation of the institution. His oversight of institutional practices included everything from revising the institutional charter to approving orders for lab supplies, and it stands in sharp contrast to contemporary expectations of institutional Trustees.⁸⁹ Over the span of twenty-five years, he also served as keynote speaker for countless assemblies including commencements, honorary degree programs, administration and staff retirements, memorials, and university anniversaries. Among Freeman's extensive commitments to civic, non-profit, scholarly, and religious associations, his dedication to the University of Richmond was his top priority.⁹⁰ Executive Committee meetings were generally held at his home, Westbourne, or his *News Leader* office. Freeman's tenure as rector saw the university through exponential growth and debilitating eras of financial hardship. Freeman was instrumental in shepherding the university through the deprivations of the Great Depression and World War II, during which he monitored waning investments, budget losses, faculty staffing, and salaries, and academic needs that resulted from limited funding. In an effort to procure ancillary funding for the university from the Federal Government, he assisted in the establishment of military training programs on the campus.⁹¹ As University Rector, he also donated funds to assist the university at key times when they were most needed, and he provided the institution's mace, chapel reredos, altar tablet, and books for the library.⁹² During more prosperous times, he promoted the University of Richmond through his *News Leader* editorials and approved articles about university happenings in an effort to raise public



Douglas Southall Freeman, *Alumni Bulletin*, University of Richmond, July 1950

⁸⁹ For examples of Freeman's oversight in the minutia of university operations see Presidential Correspondence of Frederic W. Boatwright 1910-1946: Collection of Boatwright's correspondence with Freeman 1922-1946

⁹⁰ Johnson, 208.

⁹¹ Trustee Records, Reel: 7-121-P, VBGB, UR Trustees, Janette-Jackson, F.T. (S), Jeter Diary, yrs. 1942: February 3, 1942 and June 1, 1942; 1943: February 4, 1943 and May 24, 1943; 1944: February 3, 1944 and May 29, 1944; 1954: February 6, 1945 and June 4, 1945, VBHS.

⁹² Presidential Correspondence of Frederic W. Boatwright: Collection of Boatwright's Correspondence with Douglas Southall Freeman, letter from Boatwright to Freeman dated December 30, 1943, Boatwright Library Special Collections, University of Richmond; Executive Committee Minutes, Folder: 1941, Virginia Baptist Historical Society (reredos and tablet); Executive Committee Minutes, Folder: 1944, Virginia Baptist Historical Society (mace); Trustee Records, Reel: MF10-424 P, UR Board of Trustee Minutes, 1947-1967, Virginia Historical Society, yr. 1948 (books).

recognition and support.⁹³ From the moment Freeman became rector, he initiated aggressive development and public relations efforts, employing his noted style of networking with influential people in the state to further the growth of the university.⁹⁴ Through a review of Board of Trustees and Executive Committee minutes, it is clear that Freeman considered university public relations essential for fundraising and growth. He also oversaw the implementation of both life insurance and retirement plans for faculty and staff along with strategizing fundraising efforts such as the Million Dollar Campaign. Approved by the Board of Trustees in 1944, this campaign's goals were to raise the funds necessary to construct a "Central University Library," a "Dormitory for Westhampton College" and supplement the university's "Endowment." Freeman was appointed to the campaign committee in 1944 and President Boatwright oversaw the effort until his retirement in 1946.⁹⁵

In 1936, when local business leader Louis Powell threatened institutional fundraising efforts because of what he believed to be the radicalism of some of the faculty, Freeman stood up for the institution and academic freedom, writing that "the University of Richmond trustees would close the institution 'before they would say that teachers must pussyfoot intellectually or bury secretly the honest findings of their inquiry.'" Were the institution to be influenced by threats such as Powell's, "[b]etter no university than one that is afraid of truth... better a denial to young Richmonders of any college education than timid training by teachers who could be bullied into intellectual trimming." Former University of Richmond faculty member and historian, W. Harrison Daniel writes that the "controversy involving academic freedom represented perhaps the finest hour in the history of the university."⁹⁶

During his tenure as rector, Freeman faced leadership challenges. In March of 1946, a luncheon held in his home following a Cannon Memorial Chapel program to confer honorary degrees upon General Dwight D. Eisenhower and Admiral Chester W. Nimitz unexpectedly spawned the "mint julep controversy." Some Baptist ministers and members of the Baptist Board of Missions and Education were outraged that Freeman served alcohol to the visitors under the auspices of an institutional event. This resulted in Freeman's offer to resign from the Board of Trustees.⁹⁷ President Boatwright adeptly smoothed over the difficulties with the Baptist Board of Missions and Education by emphasizing that alcohol was served at Freeman's home, not during the assembly held at the university.⁹⁸ Three years later in 1949, another issue developed involving long-standing alumni and

⁹³ DSF, "Eleven Hundred Hopes," RNL, June 7, 1923, LOV; "U. of R. President Sees Need of More Equipment," RNL, June 5, 1923, LOV.

⁹⁴ Johnson, 209.

⁹⁵ Board of Trustees Records, 1944, Reel 7-121-P), University Archives, VBHS; Executive Committee Minutes, January 24, 1944, University Archives, VBHS.

⁹⁶ Daniel, 167.

⁹⁷ Executive Committee Minutes, Folder: 1946, doc. 91, 1, April 4, 1946, University Archives, University of Richmond, VBHS. A detailed account of the controversy is found in Johnson, 289-291.

⁹⁸ Presidential Correspondence of Frederic W. Boatwright: Collection of Boatwright's Correspondence with Douglas Southall Freeman, letter from Boatwright to Sen. M. M. Long, June 10, 1946, Boatwright

fraternity member objections to a trustee mandated fraternity housing policy. This policy, calling for the eleven fraternities at the university to build lodges on campus and employ housemothers, met with varied resistance from some fraternities already established on campus in alternate housing, fraternal organizations with off-campus residences, and fraternities which could not afford to build a lodge on campus.⁹⁹ The issue stemmed from claims that not all fraternities were represented on the Executive Committee and, thus, favoritism could be shown. To solve this dilemma, the Executive Committee asked the trustees to establish a special committee to investigate the lodging issue which was to be comprised of trustees who were fraternity alums and several non-fraternity members.¹⁰⁰ The debate led Freeman to “threaten to resign.”¹⁰¹ Freeman’s ultimate decision to resign as Rector of the Board of Trustees of the University of Richmond came in June of 1950 and stemmed from his decades-long disapproval of colleges and universities prioritizing athletics over academics, a matter of wide debate during his tenure on the board. During a special meeting of the Executive Committee and Athletic Program representatives, he refused to agree to further loans to underpin the struggling Athletic Department.¹⁰² This time, he would not entertain attempts by administrators, other trustees, or alumni who were imploring him to remain on the Board of Trustees. No evidence has been located in institutional records indicating Freeman continued to serve as an advisor to President George M. Modlin after his departure from the board. He concentrated instead on his research and writing of the sixth volume in his ultimately seven-volume biography of George Washington.¹⁰³

His personal donations to the University of Richmond include his gifts of the University mace, the Cannon chapel reredos, a scholarship in the name of his son, financial support to meet immediate institutional needs, monetary gifts to Richmond College and Westhampton College, and books donated to the university’s library. Freeman’s daughter, Mary Tyler Freeman Cheek McClenahan and her then husband Leslie Cheek established the Douglas Southall Freeman Chair in History in his honor. The Douglas Southall Freeman Lecture Series was an outgrowth of the establishment of the Chair position.¹⁰⁴ Both the Freeman Society (a midcentury debating club) and Freeman Hall were named for Douglas Southall Freeman but were not funded by Freeman or his family. Freeman Hall was dedicated in 1965, twelve years after Freeman’s death in 1953.

Library Special Collections, University of Richmond.

⁹⁹ While the debate around fraternal housing spanned the years 1938-1949, the period of highest activity was from 1945-1949. A series of emblematic examples can be found in Executive Committee Minutes, Folders 1945-1949: Nov 14, 1945; May 26, 1947; May 31, 1948; and June 10, 1949, VBHS.

¹⁰⁰ Trustees Records, 1947-1967, Reel: MF 10-424 P, June 6, 1949, VBHS.

¹⁰¹ Johnson, 336.

¹⁰² Executive Committee Minutes, Folder: 1950, June 6, 1950, VBHS.

¹⁰³ Volume seven of Freeman’s *George Washington* was written by Mary Wells Ashworth and John Carroll using Freeman’s notes (Johnson, 356).

¹⁰⁴ Daniel, *History at the University of Richmond*, 322-323.

SUMMARY CONCLUSION

Over a lifetime of achievement, influence, and unparalleled public communication, race-based determinism dictated Freeman's perspective on key issues and on his beliefs regarding the equal rights and treatment of Black people. In addition to his literary career, his work in journalism, and other well-considered parts of his biography, Freeman's convictions regarding the inherent dominance of white people is a significant part of his life and legacy. While Freeman did not think of himself as an extremist and, at times, disagreed with racial purity activists, his was a disagreement of approach rather than principle. Historical context provided by this report will enable holistic understanding of the times and environment in which Freeman lived and worked, his beliefs, and the ways in which he shaped the social and political world around him.



Freeman Hall, University of Richmond (Suzanne Slye, 2020)