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# The Founding of Richmond: William Byrd II's Heroic Odyssey

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## THE FOUNDING OF RICHMOND: WILLIAM BYRD II'S HEROIC ODYSSEY

JONATHAN ANTHONY OHLMANN

For a young, wealthy law student with a bright future, the prospect of becoming a distinguished politician of the British Parliament would seem like an effortless transition. Yet William Byrd II possessed a unique background which forever altered his life and set him on a different path -- a heroic path. William Byrd II's fatal flaw was that he was born in Virginia to an ambitious colonist, but returned to England at a young age to receive the best education possible. Despite having all the tools necessary to succeed in British politics, Byrd II was seen as an outsider because he was not born in England. As a result, Byrd II struggled to ascend in the ranks of Parliament and achieve his full potential. For years, Byrd II clung to England and attempted to make a name for himself as a writer and politician, but he was continuously rejected by the British government and, on a more personal level, by the elite English women he attempted to court.

Byrd II found himself in a unique position. Despite having all the talent, wealth, and privileges to be successful, he was nevertheless shunned because of his birth place. After being rebuffed by elite British women in his private life, and achieving little success in rising to power within the British

government in his public life, Byrd II realized his heroic journey would not take place in England. He would have to embark on a journey in order to leave his mark on the world. As we will see, Byrd received his opportunity in 1705 after the death of his father, and he took full advantage of the occasion.

#### PURPOSE OF THIS CHAPTER

When discussing the great heroes who have shaped the landscape of the storied city of Richmond, it is impossible not to mention the individual directly responsible for founding the city: William Byrd II. The goal of this chapter is to shed light on William Byrd II's unique story and highlight his heroic journey to establishing Richmond. The chapter will take an in depth look at the personal transformation Byrd II underwent upon arriving back in Virginia. I will also describe the profound impact that Byrd II had on society as a whole.

Byrd II's extraordinary heroism would not be possible without his possession of distinctly heroic qualities; thus it is important to delve into how these traits helped Byrd II to found Richmond. I will also describe his myriad remarkable achievements using trait theories and taxonomies developed by many distinguished experts in the field of heroism science. Byrd II's heroic contributions are profoundly valuable because they laid the foundation for many great heroes of Richmond who followed him. Without Byrd II's display of ambition, courage, and generosity to found Richmond, many great champions of the city may not have had the platform to become heroes and better society.

William Byrd II's journey is also unique because of the unlikely obstacles he faced. Because of his privilege, education, and wealth, it is reasonable to assume he would have little difficulty finding success, yet his place of birth served as an intractable hindrance that forced him to embark on an unplanned and unwanted heroic journey. William Byrd II's life contained fascinating examples of heroism and featured a distinct heroic transformation that enabled him to leave a deep mark on society.

## THE HEROIC JOURNEY: THE MONOMYTH

Before discussing the heroic journey of William Byrd II, we begin with an overview of the work of Joseph Campbell, a comparative mythologist who studied tales of heroism from around the world. Campbell noticed a distinct pattern in the style and flow of all hero mythology. Campbell discerned three stages in the journey: *departure* from a familiar world, a *call to action and initiation*, and the *return* as a changed individual (Campbell, 1949). The first stage of the journey occurs when the hero is in her familiar world and is forced to leave to confront a challenge. At this stage, the hero is oblivious of her heroic capabilities and is missing an essential heroic quality. The hero then enters stage two of her journey, the call to action and initiation. During this stage, the hero undergoes many trials and tribulations which forge the average individual's character into that of a hero who is ready to transformatively change society. As part of this phase, the hero acquires the necessary traits of heroism, and the hero is also forced to look within and learn important information about herself.

After the hero has obtained her missing quality and overcome all apparent obstacles, she then returns home with the skills and ability to enhance society, the stage that Campbell (1949) refers to as the "boon" or gift to society. Campbell's monomyth is key to understanding the heroism of William Byrd II, as Byrd II's life story closely mirrors the monomythic pattern of the hero's journey. By examining the life of William Byrd II in the context of the Campbell's stages of the hero's journey, Byrd II's heroism becomes readily apparent and can be fully appreciated.

## THE FAMILIAR WORLD: A LIFE OF PRIVILEGE

William Byrd II was born in central Virginia in what is now called the city of Richmond on March 28, 1674. He was the son of an ambitious and wealthy plantation owner, William Byrd, who traveled to the New World in search of a better life than he previously had in England. Byrd II spent the first years of his life in the Virginia Colony of the New World before moving to Essex,

England to receive the best possible education. Due to the massive wealth his father had acquired, Byrd II had every opportunity necessary to enjoy professional success. However, with great opportunity and resources also came immense pressure to succeed. Byrd II felt compelled to live up to the success of his father, harboring a strong personal desire to make the most of his plethora of resources and opportunities.

Byrd II was determined to make the most of his privilege and avoid leeching off the success of his father in the New World. Byrd II received education at the prestigious Felsted Grammar School in Essex, and then proceeded to study law at the Middle Temple in London, where he was admitted to the bar in 1695 after 3 years of schooling. Byrd II also spent years in a business apprenticeship in Holland and London in order to widen his understanding of commerce. The impressive education that Byrd II received enabled him to pursue a profession in a wide range of promising fields.

Considering his intelligence and education, Byrd II was expected to excel in myriad disciplines and professional pursuits. In addition to his vast understanding of law and commerce, Byrd had an affinity for science and was accepted into the Royal Society for science based on his outstanding scientific accomplishments. After stints writing witty diaries and social commentaries, as well as scientific contributions, Byrd II received his first entry into the world of British politics when he was appointed Virginia's colonial agent in London. The position of colonial agent was one of significant prestige, as Byrd II was required to represent the colony's interests to the British Parliament. This position seemed to be Byrd II's gateway to a bright and fulfilling career as a politician. Byrd II advocated decreasing the power of Royal Governors in the colonies and was one of the earliest advocates for small pox vaccinations. Byrd II was in a sense a trail blazer, writing numerous scholarly pieces attempting to enlighten the public on the importance of vaccination (Long, 2013).

Byrd II identified himself as an Englishmen, despite having been born in the American colonies, and his progressive and enlightened values led him to become a strong proponent for the betterment of the colonies. Despite Byrd II's strong British identity and elite social and educational status, he was seen

as an outcast by the British elite. The opposition that Byrd II faced manifested itself in rejection by elite and desirable British women, as well as stagnation and difficulty ascending the ranks in his political career. William Byrd II often struggled to balance his desire to be seen as a true Englishman with his identification as a Virginian (Manning, 1994). While discouraged by his inability to ascend to more prestigious positions or find a suitable wife to start a family, Byrd II was determined to leave his mark in England. Byrd II continued to argue for the best interests of the colonies and to increase his knowledge of the world around him despite a growing sense of being a societal outcast because of his place of birth.

Byrd II desired much more from life, yet did not know how to achieve the sense of fulfillment and belongingness that he so desperately craved. Unbeknownst to Byrd II, the opportunity to become a hero would arise in 1704.

#### CALL TO ACTION: THE PERFECT OPPORTUNITY

While William Byrd II was creating his legacy in England, his father was amassing even greater wealth while also establishing himself as a key political figure in the young colony of Virginia. Byrd II's life changed completely in 1704 following the death of his father. Byrd II now had to return to his place of birth where he had spent very little time, with the goal of taking over his father's finances, real property, and the office of receiver general which his father had held. Now faced with the task of starting a new life in the New World, Byrd II became invigorated with a fresh sense of ambition, determination, and purpose.

The young colony of Virginia was a malleable jurisdiction waiting for a hero to shape it, and Byrd II decided he would be the leader whom Virginia craved. Byrd II also seized the opportunity to commence a new chapter in his life by starting a family. Byrd II married Lucy Parke, and had four children, two of whom died in infancy. One of Byrd II's earliest opportunities for heroism arose following the death of his father-in-law. In an act of generosity and sympathy toward his grieving wife, Byrd II acquired his father-in-law's holdings and in the process took on immense amount of debt from his

father-in-law. Byrd II paid off every last cent of this debt throughout his life, never once regretting the decision. This act illustrates Byrd II's desire to use the funds he inherited to act in a benevolent manner and better the community by preventing these lands from becoming abandoned.

In a display of his newfound ambition, Byrd II attempted to run for Governor of Virginia as a way to bolster his legacy and leave his mark on the young colony. This ambitious campaign ultimately fell short as Byrd II was unsuccessful, yet it served to further motivate him to seek out other leadership opportunities in Virginia. Following his unsuccessful run for Governor, Byrd II returned to London to further his political career.

Byrd II endured perhaps his greatest challenge in dealing with the death of his wife Lucy, who succumbed to smallpox. The loss of Lucy utterly crushed William Byrd II, even leading to him to blame himself for her death. Byrd II believed that God was punishing him for taking excessive pride in the exquisite beauty of his wife. The tragic loss of his wife did perhaps have a significant silver lining by teaching Byrd humility. While devastated, William Byrd II was determined to continue to advocate on the behalf of the colonies, specifically Virginia, before the British Parliament. Byrd eventually remarried during his time in Britain when he won the hand of Maria Taylor in 1724. His political attempts yet again saw little success and he was sent back to Virginia as a delegate.

Upon his return to Virginia, Byrd II served on the Virginia Governor's council, where he was an advisory aid to the Virginia Royal Governor, the highest judiciary for Virginia. For most people, holding this prestigious position would be more than satisfactory, yet William Byrd II desired far more out of life. Byrd II was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses, where he served as a legislative representative to the colonies. Even with all this political success in Virginia, Byrd II never forgot the importance of putting the best interests of the people first. Throughout his life, William Byrd II served as an advocate for the people of Virginia who did not have a voice in British politics. Byrd II's heroic efforts in politics earned him considerable respect among the people of Virginia, and this respect grew significantly following his next heroic effort.

Although he displayed many courageous traits throughout his life, William Byrd II had yet to truly achieve the status of a heroic leader. Byrd II received a good opportunity to display heroic leadership in 1728 when he led a group to establish the location of the Virginia-North Carolina border. This epic expedition allowed Byrd II to finally leave his mark on Virginia by helping to formalize its geographical boundary. Byrd II's central goal when he began his ambitious chapter in the New World was to leave his mark on the blank slate that was Virginia, and by defining its border he had finally accomplished this goal. Upon his return from this difficult and treacherous journey, William Byrd II was revered for his ambition, bravery, and overall heroism. The colony of Virginia was so grateful for his heroic efforts that he was rewarded with a substantial grant of land, thus adding to his already impressive mass of real estate and wealth.

With the large amounts of land that Byrd II had acquired throughout his lifetime from intelligent business ventures, Byrd II was determined to use this property to make a positive difference and lay the foundation for future progress in the great colony of Virginia. Byrd II first set his sights on repairing and improving the great Westover Estate, the lavish home of his father which, because of its incredible size and beauty, served as the signature landmark of the Virginia community. Byrd II poured a great deal of funds into the revitalization of the Westover Estate to cement it as a focal point of the community. In doing so, Byrd II attempted to lead by example to lay the foundation for a high standard of quality within the community. He was successful in his attempt and created a beautiful property which served as a beacon of hope for many.

#### THE RETURN: BYRD II'S GREATEST GIFT AND LASTING LEGACY

The crowning moment of William Byrd II's heroic journey came on April 22, 1737, when Byrd II announced the creation of the city of Richmond in the *Virginia Gazette*. Byrd II had given an impressive amount of his land to be developed into a city that would serve as the heart of Virginia. Byrd II personally had the land developed, and he put up lots for sale so that the



people of Virginia had the opportunity to become citizens of the great new city. Because Byrd II had received a fine education in the fields of business and commerce, he understood the importance of creating new businesses to spark economic development. Byrd used his Indian trader connections to create a trading fort in Richmond. This decision proved to be crucial in the development of Richmond, as it brought commerce and capital into the city. The new city helped to unite the colonists and give them a space in which they could grow and prosper together as a community. Byrd II's heroic plan served as a unifying and bonding mechanism for the colonists, who needed to join together to overcome the many challenges of living in the New World. Due to the poor living conditions in the colonies, as well as the occasional oppressive measures that the colonists endured from the British government, the colonists craved something to unite them through difficult times. The city of Richmond served as this unifying force and gave the people of Virginia a place in which to grow and prosper.

In the seven years between the founding of Richmond in 1737 and Byrd II's death in 1744, Byrd watched the city he worked so hard to create blossom into a great center of knowledge, commerce, and culture. Byrd II was elected President of the Governor's Council the year before his death, a recognition of his lifetime of devotion to public service. With Byrd II's health declining, he returned to England to say goodbye to his friends and colleagues who helped to shape him into the legendary hero he had become.

Byrd II's heroic life came to an end in 1744 when he died of natural causes. His wealth and land was inherited by his son, William Byrd III. While the death of Byrd II marked the loss of Richmond's first and arguably its greatest hero, his legacy endures. Byrd II's most impactful gift to American society is undoubtedly the city of Richmond, which has transformed over the centuries into a major metropolitan city, serving as the capital of the Commonwealth of Virginia. This remarkable city has also served as the location for a myriad of historic events, cultural activities, and heroic acts by some of the most iconic individuals in American history, as evidenced by the heroes described in this volume.

Byrd II also influenced society in many other positive ways. Most importantly, Byrd II's heroism is evident in his unwavering dedication to his campaign to increase awareness of the dangers of smallpox. Furthermore, his early scientific work investigating the possibility of a smallpox vaccination helped to spark future research, which ultimately saved innumerable lives around the world.

Another key contribution of William Byrd II is his numerous secret diaries which were discovered long after his death. These in-depth journal entries have given modern historians and scholars a vivid first-hand account of the commerce, social dynamics, and politics of 18<sup>th</sup> century Virginia (Treckel, 1997). Byrd II's personal logs have significantly advanced our modern understanding of what it was like to live in America prior to the Revolutionary War. His diaries shed light upon the previously unknown mindset and life of an elite, wealthy politician and plantation owner. From his diaries we glean what it was like to be a man of passion who had to balance his busy life of work, family, and religion, while also quenching his strong desire to enhance his knowledge of the world around him. Byrd II's works, *The History and Present State of Virginia* and *The History of the Dividing Line Betwixt Virginia and North Carolina*, also had an immeasurable impact on future understandings of American history. These works, which were written following Byrd II's expedition to define the Virginia-North Carolina Border, have given historians a firsthand account of this fascinating expedition as well as insight into the inner workings of colonial Virginia. William Byrd II left many gifts to society following his return from that heroic journey, and the benefits of those gifts are still being reaped by scholars to this very day.

#### FORGED BY THE HEAT OF ADVERSITY: WILLIAM BYRD II'S TRANSFORMATION

Filling the shoes of his father William Byrd, a brave man himself who emigrated to the New World in search of a better life and who carved out a distinguished career, would seem to have been an insurmountable task for William Byrd II. Yet this is the precise task Byrd II faced when coming to Virginia following the death of his remarkably successful father. Byrd II not only lived

up to the impressive legacy of his father, but managed to exceed expectations and become a hero himself as a result of a heroic transformation that he underwent.

Prior to Byrd II's transformation into a heroic figure, he was a privileged man of intellect attempting to make a name for himself in England. Yet he faced adversity and struggled to find purpose due to a distinct lack of key heroic traits. Byrd II initially lacked heroic levels of ambition, a willingness to take risks, and leadership skills, deficits made evident by some of his early failures. Along with missing some key heroic qualities, Byrd II struggled heavily with his identity. He constantly faced an internal battle between his desire to be considered an Englishman and his loyalty to his Virginia roots. This internal conflict perhaps contributed to his lack of ambition, as he was too distracted by issues of self-identity to focus on his goals. Outside opinions were also deterrents to William Byrd II becoming a hero in England. Researchers have shown that there are indeed impediments to heroism which suppress one's ability to achieve greatness (Parks, 2017). Since William Byrd II was born in Virginia rather than in England, he was seen as an outsider or part of an "outgroup" by the British elite. Because William Byrd II was not accepted by English society, his ambition and willingness to take risks were suppressed, which inhibited his ability to achieve heroic status.

Following the death of his father, William Byrd II received a golden opportunity to transform himself and shed the impediments to heroism that he faced in England. Byrd II viewed Virginia as a blank slate where he could leave his mark and become the hero that Virginia needed. As a result of the myriad of opportunities and resources that Byrd II now had, he was finally able to evolve and develop useful ambition. This heroic ambition allowed Byrd II to take many risks and strive to be successful in every facet of life. While in Virginia for the second time, Byrd II had transformed into a hero who was willing to lead and better society in any way he could. With his newfound heroic qualities, Byrd II amassed considerable success in the form of wealth and prestigious titles. He then bestowed many gifts to society, which still exert influence on Virginia's citizens today. Through all this success, Byrd II stayed true to his heroic cause. Many lesser individuals would develop villainous qualities like greed, selfishness, or arrogance when greeted with such

immense success, yet Byrd II remained focused on giving everything he could to the colony of Virginia. His heroism culminated with the founding of the great city of Richmond. In many ways, the more success that Byrd II enjoyed, the more he became generous and sought to take more heroic risks in order to better the community. This escalation of heroic generosity and bravery serve to both highlight Byrd II's benevolent intentions as well as dispel the notion that Byrd II's deeds were a product of purposeful selfishness.

The transformation which Byrd II underwent was absolutely crucial to his development into a hero. While Byrd II's evolution is obvious in the context of his heroic journey, it is important to also understand the purpose of his transformation as well. The main purpose of the hero's journey is to foster developmental growth, promote healing, cultivate social unity, advance society, and deepen spiritual and cosmic understandings (Allison & Goethals, 2017). William Byrd II's heroic transformation brought about each of these results.

As William Byrd II underwent his transformation, he grew and developed into a stronger leader. The courage and leadership ability he demonstrated in commanding a treacherous expedition to define the Virginia-North Carolina border are qualities he lacked prior to this transformation, yet he gained those qualities through developmental growth. Prior to his transformation, Byrd II lacked ambition and purpose because he felt he lacked the opportunity to succeed as a result of his place of birth. Upon moving to Virginia, Byrd II had the resources and opportunities to pursue any goal his heart desired. The vast opportunities of the New World sparked a new sense of ambition and belief within Byrd II that he could accomplish anything and make as significant an impact on the world as he desired.

As a result of Byrd II's heroism, the hardships the colonists faced in Virginia were ameliorated. A clear example is the profoundly favorable impact the city of Richmond had on the people of Virginia. Faced with British oppression and unfavorable living conditions, the colonists craved a sanctuary where economic, cultural, and social growth could flourish. The city gave the citizens hope that even though life in the colonies was difficult, there was a bright future ahead thanks to the heroism of William Byrd II. His founding of

Richmond served as the platform for the colonists to begin rebuilding their lives and work towards a brighter future.

As a result of Byrd II's transformation, a much-needed sense of unity was instilled within the colony. The founding of Richmond served as a center for the colonists to work together to create an identity for the New World. Virginia, and the New World as a whole, lacked an identity in its infancy, but as a result of Byrd's heroic transformation, the colonists were gifted a blank canvas to create a unique urban culture. This opportunity, created by Byrd II, united the colonists by instilling a sense of hope within the community and giving the colonists a common goal. The founding of Richmond also led to a distinct advancement of colonial society.

In addition to instilling citizens with a sense of group identity, the city grew to become one of the first major cities in Virginia, eventually blossoming into the state capital. The foundation which William Byrd II laid as a result of his heroic transformation served to advance society and set colonial Virginia on its storied path. Finally, as a man of faith, Byrd II routinely worked hard to maintain a strong relationship with God and to act on his religious ideals (Byrd II, 1709). Byrd often prayed for society to be rid of plague and other tribulations, underscoring his devotion to bettering the community from a spiritual standpoint (Byrd II, 1709). It is worth noting that while Byrd II had strong religious and spiritual ties, he was by no means a perfect man. He occasionally wrote in his diaries of mistakes he made such as adultery and lust, yet he always sought to repent for these sins to stay on a faithful path.

Upon careful analysis of William Byrd II's heroic transformation, parallels to Allison and Goethals' (2017) analysis of the hero's transformation become quite apparent. William Byrd II's distinctly changed from an individual struggling with his political career identity to a benevolent leader willing to blaze trails and inspire positive change. This growth exemplifies the classic characteristics of pre- and post-heroic transformation (Allison & Goethals, 2017). Prior to his move to Virginia, William Byrd II stagnated in multiple areas of his life. His political career had slowed to a crawl and he struggled mightily to find a wife to start a family. Upon starting his new life in Virginia, Byrd II soared through the political ranks, created a remarkable legacy, and

had a successful and happy home life. This distinct change clearly shows a transition from stagnation to growth in many facets of Byrd II's life and career. Byrd II was able to escape his bout of stagnation by being "prod-ded" and moving to Virginia out of necessity. This was one of the main catalysts of Byrd II's remarkable transformation into one of the great heroes of Richmond.

Igniting William Byrd II's heroic transformation was the exceptional existential courage he developed. During William Byrd II's early life in Britain, he was ostracized heavily and considered an outsider by most Englishmen. Byrd II struggled mightily with the label of an outcast and it led to serious internal struggles with his self-identity. Yet upon moving to Virginia, Byrd was able to come to terms with his identity and develop the existential courage to pursue his heroic journey and look past the oppression and discrimination he faced. The Christian existentialist Paul Tillich (1952) conceptualized existential courage in terms of "the courage to be." This notion of the "courage to be" directly relates to Byrd II; despite constant rejection solely because of his place of birth, Byrd II was able to shed his internal struggle and develop a sense of identity and self-worth. Byrd II's heroic existential courage allowed him to work toward building his legacy despite the social risk of further condemnation. The foundation of existential courage is one's willingness to choose a path in life in order to grow and thrive, despite an apparent social risk (Kramer, 2017). Byrd II's existential courage allowed him to act without a persistent cloud of doubt and fear of failure. This courage enabled him to develop key heroic traits and advance society, culminating with the founding of Richmond.

#### WILLIAM BYRD II'S TRANSFORMATIVE EFFECT ON SOCIETY

A key determining factor in assessing whether an individual is a hero or not is her impact on society and in what ways she acts as a transformative agent for society. William Byrd II's heroism resulted in myriad positive changes during his time in Virginia, as well as his short time in Great Britain. "The culmination of the hero's journey is the hero's boon, or gift, to society. This gift is what separates the hero's journey from simply being a test of personal

survival” (Allison & Goethals, 2017). William Byrd II left numerous lasting gifts to society which were a direct result of his heroism.

One striking example of William Byrd II’s gift to society was his emphasis on the importance of smallpox vaccinations. As a man with considerable scientific knowledge, William Byrd II was a strong advocate of smallpox vaccination and worked tirelessly to contribute to scientific publishing on this issue. Byrd II was highly motivated to make a positive mark on society, and one major focus was on public health. While Byrd II was only a single individual, he was successful in making the general public more aware of the benefits of smallpox vaccination, thus sparking a positive health transformation within Virginian society.

Byrd’s expedition to define the Virginia-North Carolina border represented another tremendous gift to society, as it was necessary to define that border. He also led numerous militias intended to protect the citizens from outside threats. Byrd II’s crowning achievement and greatest gift to society was his pivotal role in establishing the future capital of Virginia, the city of Richmond. Due to the fortune Byrd II inherited from his father, as well as his ability to grow his wealth, Byrd II found himself in a position to make these immense contributions to Virginia.

#### KEYS TO HEROISM: HEROIC TRAITS OF WILLIAM BYRD II

There are abundant reasons why William Byrd II became one of the great heroes of Richmond. Chief among these reasons is the fact that William Byrd II possessed many crucial heroic traits which enabled him to seize the heroic opportunities that were presented to him throughout his storied life. There are eight key traits, known as *the great eight*, which are the necessary characteristics of a hero (Allison & Goethals, 2011). The great eight qualities are *smart, strong, selfless, reliable, resilient, caring, charismatic, and inspiring*. It is unusual for a hero to possess all eight of these important traits; yet most heroes display many of them. William Byrd II consistently demonstrated five of these traits, namely, the traits of smart, resilient, reliable, caring, and inspiring.



William Byrd II clearly showed heroic intelligence throughout his life. He was a well-educated man, earning a college education as well as becoming accomplished in the fields of science, literature, commerce, business, politics, and law. This wealth of knowledge allowed Byrd II to make informed decisions and to understand complex challenges he would face. Byrd II's knowledge of commerce allowed him to make intelligent financial decisions to avoid squandering the great fortune he inherited from his father. Byrd's acumen was also a useful tool throughout his political career. His political knowledge allowed him to excel in many political offices in Virginia, culminating with his ascendancy to the presidency of the Governor's Council in the year before his death. Byrd II's heroic intelligence allowed him to consistently make savvy decisions to ensure that his heroic efforts produced optimal success.

Resilience is yet another key trait which William Byrd II possessed and utilized effectively throughout his heroic life. Despite being the recipient of constant opposition and criticism from others, Byrd II persevered and continued to fight for a better world. There are many distinct moments during Byrd II's when he could have easily given up and admitted defeat, yet Byrd II was never willing to take the easy way out. Byrd II's early failures and shortcomings impeded him from staying his course and making progress toward becoming a hero. Tribulations such as losing a campaign for governor of Virginia or losing one's wife to smallpox were highly difficult situations with which to cope, yet Byrd II never succumbed to grief. His ability to consistently overcome obstacles clearly exemplifies his heroic resilience. This key heroic trait enabled Byrd II to continue on his heroic journey and focus on creating a better world for the people of Virginia. This heroic trait is especially significant in Byrd II's heroic journey because it enabled him to have a prolonged heroic journey. Many individuals are capable of committing single heroic acts that impact a society. Yet only a select group of heroes possess the great degree of reliance necessary to devote a significant portion of their lives to helping others and exerting a positive impact on the world. Byrd II was able to prolong his heroism due to his remarkable resilience, thus enabling him to become one of the most iconic heroes in Richmond's storied history.



Another key trait of a hero is dependability. For those in distress and in desperate need of heroic assistance, their saviors must be reliable so that recipients of heroism can be assured of safety and protection. In the case of William Byrd II, the colonists of Virginia desperately needed someone willing and able to push back against the oppressive British parliament, as well as someone willing to break new ground and be the leader Virginia needed in order to blossom. Regardless of the situation, Byrd II used his wealth of knowledge and available tools to act in a heroic manner and leave a positive mark on society. Whether Byrd II was needed to fight for the rights of the colonists, embark on a journey to define a border, or use his financial resources to develop the future capital of Virginia, Byrd II instinctively answered all calls to heroism thereby helping his society to prosper and grow. Byrd II devoted himself to bettering the New World and was determined to do anything he could regardless of the task at hand. For the colonists who faced many hardships on a daily basis, knowing that William Byrd II was reliably fighting for the betterment of society allowed them some peace of mind and a degree of hope for a brighter future.

While popular culture glorifies and reveres the strong, tough, and fearless superhero often seen in comics and films, a hero's compassion and ability to care for others is often a far more valuable heroic trait. William Byrd II's caring nature enabled him to put the well-being of others into perspective and strive to better their collective situation. Byrd II's efforts to advocate for the people of Virginia demonstrated his heroic compassion and ability to care for others. For example, Byrd II bravely advocated for smallpox vaccinations as well as less royal control of the colonies in order to improve the lives of the colonists of the New World. The plight of the colonists was well understood by Byrd II, and he strove to improve their well-being thus enhancing the welfare of Virginia as a whole. By founding the city of Richmond, Byrd II created a hub for prosperity which helped to ease the oppression and hardship that weighed heavy on the shoulders of colonial society. Byrd II's compassion was also evident in his decision to take on his father-in-law's debts, allowing his wife to have access to her father's belongings and therefore demonstrating his ability to sympathize and care for others. Heroic caring is one of the most unsung qualities necessary to become an effective hero, and William Byrd II

masterfully harnessed his compassion to impact his family and society in a positive manner.

The final heroic trait that William Byrd II consistently displayed throughout his legendary life was his ability to inspire others. It is crucial for heroes to inspire their followers in order to bring about a deep, meaningful, and lasting enhancement of society. Byrd II was able to inspire and lead by example in order to push the malleable New World toward a brighter future. During the infancy of colonial America, difficult living conditions left colonists distraught and in need of an inspiring leader. Byrd II worked to become a model Virginian to inspire those around him to also work toward achieving a brighter future. By witnessing the heroic acts of William Byrd II, the people of Virginia were inspired to overcome their struggles and build a better future for themselves and for future Virginians.

#### DEFINING WILLIAM BYRD II'S UNIQUE HEROISM

William Byrd II's life consisted of many heroic deeds performed in many different ways. Byrd II is undoubtedly an iconic hero, yet because of the uniqueness of his life pattern, defining his heroism is rather challenging. According to *situationally determined heroism*, developed by Franco, Blau, & Zimbardo (2011), heroes can be separated into twelve distinct categories with respect to the situation that gives rise to their heroism. The categories of this taxonomy range from *duty bound* heroes who physically risk their lives, to *whistleblowers* who take professional risks. This wide range of heroism shows that it is sometimes difficult to label a hero who operated in multiple fields.

Because of his tireless efforts in advocating for the rights of the colonists, as well as his work developing colonial Virginian society by founding Richmond, Byrd II's heroism can be viewed as that of a *political leader*. According to the taxonomy, a political leader is an individual who "typically lead a nation or group during a time of difficulty, such as a war or disaster. They serve to unify nation, provide shared vision, and may embody qualities that are seen as necessary for the group's survival" (Franco, Blau, & Zimbardo, 2011). When this definition is applied to Byrd II's life, it becomes clear he displays

many of the qualities essential to being a political leader. When William Byrd II arrived in Virginia, the conditions were terribly harsh due to poor living conditions and oppression from the British Parliament. Byrd II devoted himself to becoming the hero that Virginia needed and pushing the young colony toward a brighter future. Byrd II used his position of power in politics, his abundant financial resources, and wealth of knowledge to fight on behalf of colonists who did not have a voice to fight for themselves. The founding of Richmond served as a unifying force for the colonists and allowed them to join together to reach common economic and cultural goals. Byrd II's devotion to bettering the colony of Virginia inspired the colonists to join in his vision for a better Virginia.

The complex heroism of William Byrd II transcends his placement into any one category. Another subtype of heroism which clearly showcases the life and character of William Byrd II is the *underdog/odds beater* category. *Underdog heroes* are described as "individuals who overcame handicap or adverse conditions and succeed in spite of such negative circumstances, thereby providing a social, moral model for others" (Franco, Blau, & Zimbardo, 2011). Byrd II can be considered an underdog hero because of his ability to beat long-odds and defy expectations. During his time in England, William Byrd II was consistently disadvantaged because of his place of birth. Byrd II was seen as an inferior citizen, inhibiting his ability to prosper in both his career and social life. While discouraged, William Byrd II never allowed himself to give up or allow others to determine his life trajectory. Byrd II's ability to succeed despite his handicap serves not only as a testament to his resilience and bravery, but also as an inspiration to others who also faced unfavorable circumstances.

## CONCLUSION

William Byrd II displayed remarkably unique and influential heroism over the course of his life. He embarked on the classic hero's journey from an ostracized politician of England to an inspirational leader of the colony of Virginia. During William Byrd II's heroic odyssey, he underwent a distinct personal transformation which allowed him to develop key heroic traits that aided him in his heroic

efforts. Without the inspiring heroism of William Byrd II, the city of Richmond, Virginia might not exist today. Certainly it would not exist in its current form, and thus we can conclude that Byrd II forever left a positive and enduring mark on Virginia by giving the Commonwealth its capital city.

Our hero Byrd II displayed many striking heroic characteristics that enabled him to unify the people of Virginia and lead colonial society towards its eventual bright, prosperous future. Byrd II catalyzed the growth of central Virginia, and gave the people of Richmond the resources and guidance necessary to thrive. His heroism is especially significant because his legendary contributions laid the foundation for the heroic work of many other Richmond notables who followed him. Heroism is a complex phenomenon consisting of a constellation of traits, motives, and actions. It is a unique process that provides rare opportunities to individuals to make a profound difference in others' lives. Those who are gifted with the opportunity to become a hero have a deeply important responsibility to act on that opportunity and lead society toward a brighter future. William Byrd II heeded the call and forever changed the New World for the better.

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