

# Emancipation Highway

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## Details

Time frame: 2010 – 2016

Scope: 77 Images

Technical: Made using a Canon DSLR EOS 5D Mark II & III with a 50mm Prime or 24/70 variable zoom lens.

## Description

### (Short)

This series documents an approx. 20 mile stretch of the formerly named “Jefferson Davis Highway,” from Richmond to Chester, VA. While most have forgotten its relationship to the legacy of the Lost Cause, it remains a visible reminder of the tensions and fractures in American culture. Richmond city renamed its stretch “Emancipation Highway” in 2020, after the violence of the White Nationalist “Unite the Right” March in Charlottesville in 2017.

Despite having been eclipsed by the interstate highway system many decades ago (which triggered a permanent economic decline) this auxiliary route is still vital for a lot of people and supports a diverse array of immigrant, black and minority owned businesses along side large corporate and industrial sites. This photographic survey focuses on the highway from an architectural perspective. Juxtaposing impressions from its dark past and commercial facades of former mid-century franchises (now reborn as new businesses) with the economic challenges of the present, revealing a collision of realities that reflect the complexity of how this space exists today.

### (Long)

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Historically, the Jefferson Davis Highway (named after the sole President of the Confederacy) , also known as the Jefferson Davis Memorial Highway, was a transcontinental highway built in the 1910s and 1920s that began in Arlington, Virginia, and extended south through the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona into California to San Diego and was envisioned as a superhighway to honor the Confederacy.

“The Jefferson Davis Highway was a pet project of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), an association of Confederate descendants that has been trying to preserve (and rewrite) Civil War history since 1894.

... The highway, then, did the work of white supremacy by stealthier means than those of other infamous groups. As the highways wended across the U.S., proponents of the UDC’s historical vision such as the Ku Klux Klan lynched black people, burned crosses, and enacted and supported Jim Crow laws.”

–Erin Blakemore for the Atlantic Magazine, August 29, 2017.

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