

Building a bigger table for racial healing

By Laura D. Hill

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About 100 people gathered at Corey’s Southern Catering and Venue Rentals to observe the National Day for Racial Healing. Courtesy of LaTonya Wallace-Conyers Photography (LaTonya Wallace-Conyers Photography)

Earlier this week, Greater Williamsburg joined communities nationwide to celebrate the National Day of Racial Healing. Since its inception in 2017, the National Day of Racial Healing has been held the day after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s holiday. This is not a coincidence. King’s vision of the “Beloved Community,” where racial discrimination, hatred and poverty are overcome by creating a just and truthful society, still inspires millions of people today.

National Day of Racial Healing activities centered on bringing diverse people together for collective action. Diversity Innovators in Tucson, Arizona, sponsored “Day of Racial Healing Conversation” for business leaders. Kennesaw State University in Georgia held “Listening and Journaling for Racial Healing.” In Richmond, Coming Together Virginia

joined forces with the Virginia Museum of History and Culture to present a National Day of Racial Healing concert.

The highest profile event was MSNBC's National Day of Racial Healing Town Hall hosted by television news anchors Joy Reid and Chris Hayes.

Locally, more than 90 community members gathered at Corey's Southern Catering and Venue Rentals, a local Black-owned business, to listen and learn during the Greater Williamsburg National Day of Racial Healing organized by Coming to the Table-Historic Triangle and sponsored by Sentara Williamsburg Regional Medical Center and Sentara CarePlex Hospital.

The evening included soothing music by the Ada Imani Harp Ministry of New Zion Baptist Church and the sharing of stories by descendants of The Reservation, a free African-American community that owned homes and businesses in York County from 1862 to 1922. The government seized the land in 1922, displacing more than 75 families, to build a military depot, which is now the site of the Yorktown Naval Weapons Station.

Furthermore, the Table Builders Awards was introduced to shine a spotlight on local organizations that are committed to building bigger tables in the Greater Williamsburg community. The winners were Historic First Baptist Church and Let Freedom Ring Foundation for the "History Half Told is Untold" documentary; Williamsburg City Council for establishing the first-ever Williamsburg Truth and Reconciliation Committee; Village: The Initiative for Equity in Education for the Local Black Histories Project; and Maximized Life Coaching and Mentoring for supporting of Black-owned businesses through Maximum Business Boot Camps.

The end goal of the local and national events is foretold in a 1956 speech by Dr. King. He said, "the end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the Beloved Community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opponents into friends. It is this type of understanding goodwill that will transform the deep gloom of the old age into the exuberant gladness of the new age. It is this love which will bring about miracles in the hearts of men."

How can we help the Greater Williamsburg community realize the achievable goals of the Beloved Community? First, we must heal!

How do we heal? We "come to the table" to create a brotherhood and sisterhood that transcends race by:

1. Uncovering and acknowledging the painful truths about America's racial history
2. Taking intentional steps to cross racial lines to build authentic relationships
3. Standing up for racial justice whenever we see or hear of racial injustices
4. Making amends to "right" historical "wrongs"
5. Supporting the reform of legal, policing, education and health systems to realize racial healing, justice and equity

At Coming to the Table-Historic Triangle, we offer a safe place to have honest dialogue about race. We work toward healing ourselves and our community from the legacies of slavery. There's always a seat at our table for you!

When we come together to build just and truthful communities, we all win!

Laura D. Hill is the founder and director of Coming to the Table-Historic Triangle, a program of the Virginia Racial Healing Institute. Learn more about her work at Comingtothetable-historictriangle.org.