

Virginia Gazette

Building a bigger table for fulfilling the dream

By LAURA D. HILL
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TNS Martin Luther King Jr. addresses crowds during the March On Washington at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C., where he gave his “I Have A Dream” speech.

“I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood.” — Martin Luther King Jr.

Monday marks the 60th anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington where the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his famous “I Have A Dream” speech. Standing at the feet of the Lincoln Memorial before more than 250,000 people,

King referred to the event as the “greatest demonstration of freedom in our nation.” The march drew diverse groups of people from all walks of life, both Black and white, Jews and gentiles, men and women, as well as millions of television viewers.

While there were dozens of speakers, King’s speech captured the spirit of the nonviolent Civil Rights movement. He called for a racial reckoning. You see, 1963 was the 100th anniversary of President Abraham Lincoln’s signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Yet, racial segregation, discrimination and disenfranchisement were laws of the land. America had not lived up to its constitutional creed that “all men are created equal and endowed with inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

“America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked ‘insufficient funds.’ But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation,” King said.

The March on Washington opened the door for the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which led to King being awarded the Nobel Peace prize, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. These twin pillars of national legislation were supposed to level playing fields and to help transform our nation by outlawing racial and gender discrimination, and ending segregation and voter disenfranchisement.



Admittedly, there has been progress. Nevertheless, America is still grappling with some of the same issues that King denounced 60 years ago, such as police brutality, racial discrimination, voting disparities and racial unrest.

How do we move forward in a polarized social climate? Go back and recharge!

This Saturday, King's son, Martin Luther King III, is leading civil rights and social justice activists back to the Lincoln Memorial to rededicate themselves to continue the work to fulfill his father's dream. More than 75,000 people are expected to attend.

As I reflect upon King's dream, I am reminded that in 2006, it was the impetus for establishing Coming to the Table, a national racial reconciliation organization with more than 50 chapters nationwide. I am honored to lead the Historic Triangle chapter. Every time we create safe spaces for people to "come to the table" to work toward healing wounds of the past, we are making King's dream a reality.

There's a seat at the table for you! I invite you to take time to read the "I Have a Dream" speech. Then ask yourself, "What can I do now to help make Dr. King's dream a reality too?"

"Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy; now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice; now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood; now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children." — King

When we come together to build a more just and inclusive community, 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.