



COMING TO THE TABLE RVA

Taking America Beyond The Legacy of Enslavement

Community Report 2020





Taking America Beyond The Legacy of Enslavement

Vision

Our vision for the United States is of a just and truthful society that acknowledges and seeks to heal from the racial wounds of the past—from slavery and the many forms of racism it spawned.

Mission

Coming to the Table provides leadership, resources, and a supportive environment for all who wish to acknowledge and heal wounds from racism that is rooted in the United States' history of slavery. Our approach to achieving our vision and mission involves four interrelated practices.

Approach

TRUTH TELLING Researching, acknowledging, and sharing personal, family and community histories of race with openness and honesty

CONNECTING Connecting to others within and across racial lines in order to develop and deepen relationships

HEALING Exploring how we can heal together through dialogue, reunion, ritual, ceremony, the arts, apology and other methods

TAKING ACTION Actively seeking to heal the wounds of racial inequality and injustice and to support racial reconciliation between individuals, within families, and in communities.

Hello Friend,

We invite you to meet Coming To The Table-RVA. We are a new non-profit on the Richmond scene dealing with our oldest problem - the legacy of enslavement and the racism it has spawned. We are excited about the work we are doing, taking disparate stories and developing a shared narrative that leads to healing.

Here in Richmond VA, we at Coming To The Table-RVA are working hard to repair the damage done by the racial wounds of the past and present. This year, we have offered over 50 events and gatherings designed to share history with openness and honesty, to connect individuals of different backgrounds, to create a space for healing, and to provide opportunities to take action. Through this approach, we are building strong communities that bridge the racial divide in Richmond, and as a result, create lasting and impactful change.

If you want to know why we do this work, read our story.

If you want to join us in developing a shared narrative of racial healing, join us at our events.

And if you are moved to help us expand this work, we invite you to help us meet our 3-year challenge grant of \$250,000.

Most importantly, we invite you to ask questions and to seek answers with us.

Your fellow seekers,

Danita Rountree Green
Co-CEO

Martha F. Rollins
Co-CEO



Martha's Story

My mom used to tell me, "Martha, you ask so many questions..." Why does the water fountain say "colored"? Why is there a separate waiting room? Why are their houses so poor? I would ask this as we drove toward our new 14 room

home on Plantation Road in Henry County.

When my husband and me moved to Richmond in 1969, I asked why shouldn't we purchase a home in Byrd Park? What is a changing neighborhood? The answer led me to work for fair housing, to working to create a stable Carillon neighborhood that believed that "good neighbors come in all colors."

After opening Martha's Mixture in 1978, I'd ask, "Why are so many black men without permanent jobs?" The answer led me to founding Boaz & Ruth, a re-entry and community development organization in Highland Park.

In the past few years, I asked why would people be uncomfortable with the statues on Monument Avenue? The horses are so beautiful, and J. E. B. Stuart and Robert E. Lee are relatives my UDC grandmother taught me to revere.

My life has been a journey of finding truthful answers. That's why I co-founded Coming To The Table- RVA in 2014. That's why I give it my time and money. CTTT-RVA helps me answer questions of history, helps me see the impact of enslavement and Jim Crow on the present, helps me take action now to repair what's broken.



Danita's Story

I have always been told I ask far too many questions "Why can't we go in THAT store?" I asked as a five-year-old. "Because I'm not shopping in anybody's basement!" was my mother's heated answer as we waited for the bus in front of down-

town Richmond's anchor department stores.

When I moved back home to Richmond as a mother with my own children, I was angry. After years of being "the first" to integrate schools, "first" in my career and professional goals, my sons still faced a world where they were considered "the least and the last" because of the color of their skin. And that was dangerous.

My writing and academic career allowed me to travel and face a painful truth - after all the marching and protesting, the narrative surrounding black people had not changed. I decided to change that narrative in RVA.

Throughout my life, I've been able to see how racism impacts people of color and how the American Slave Trade never dissolved but actually evolved into something more hideous - a lie based on race, creating inequity.

My life is a quest for answers that can only be found through honest dialogue and intentional listening. CTTT-RVA addresses the wounds of our past and builds bridges across the racial divide. The construct of race is a narrative based in fear. Let's imagine a future without it.

"I had no idea that African Americans in Richmond were still dealing with such hostility and racism. I had to know if there was a way I could help. Coming To The Table helps me take small steps to acknowledge and heal the racial wounds of the past."

- Meta Braymer

Coming To The Table RVA's Story Began with Friends Asking Questions...



First There Were Two

How can we be friends if we don't know one another?
How can we know one another when there is still so much structural separation?

Martha Rollins (relative of Robert E. Lee) and Danita Green (child of the civil rights era) share the story of their friendship from meeting (2009) as it developed intentionally over 10 years from casual to connected to committed. At the root was their willingness to have honest, courageous and clumsy conversations – the hallmark of CTTT. In 2014 they partnered to begin hosting regular “Listening Luncheons” in their homes. These luncheons provided a vehicle for connecting people intentionally across the artificial and systemic racial divisions in Richmond.

Encouraged by the growing circle of relationships, the friends attended the 2014 national Coming To The Table gathering at Eastern Mennonite University. They returned home and began holding their first Coming To The Table-Richmond (CTTT-RVA) gatherings alternating between Martha's and Danita's homes.



Then There Were Four ...

In 2016 Darren Utley and Joshua Stepney joined Danita and Martha to create a Co-Conveners team that met weekly for very honest and courageous conversations about the direction of CTTT- RVA. What should our gatherings look like? Where do we meet? How do we invite people? How do we deal with doing infinite and important work in a finite time frame? How do we model CTTT values and live into the CTTT vision of taking America beyond the legacy of enslavement?

“I like participating in the CTTT-RVA Movie Circle. The documentaries are very informative and provoked much discussion at the dinner table. This is a great way to learn history and build relationships.”

– Brett, Movie Circle Participant

And Listening and Sharing Stories...



And More ...

Small groups with shared interests and activities began to form, deepening and strengthening relationships across old constructed barriers of race. Some groups, like the food circle, shared vital work. Others, such as the movie and book circles, connected individuals with art, history and each other. Cheryl Goode and Darren initiated a second CTTT- RVA dinner gathering at St. Johns UCCC. Marsha Summers accepted the challenge of feeding the Third Tuesday gathering at Ginter Park Presbyterian. Barbara Brown developed the Movie Group. Cheryl and Marsha also led the Book Group. Hayat Bain initiated the Healing Circle.

Facilitators Circle came into being to provide trained facilitators for our monthly dinner gatherings. How do we help strangers from different backgrounds enter into meaningful, transforming conversations? Bonnie Dowdy began sharing her extensive knowledge and experience in monthly facilitator trainings and in yearly retreats.

And Still More....

In January 2019, the showing of the documentary *A Moral Debt: The Legacy of Slavery in the USA* at the Virginia Museum of History and Culture (VMHC) highlighted the work of CTTT-RVA and resulted in increased participation in local gatherings. The Third Tuesday dinner conversations grew to consistent attendance of 60 to 80 folks eager to talk about "repairing what is broken." Joyful Feast in partnership with CTTT-RVA holds monthly Second Wednesday gatherings. People in Richmond are hungry for fellowship at a common table and for learning historical narratives so long buried especially for much of the white community. Richmonders want to be part of racial healing – CTTT-RVA provides a community of learning, listening, healing, connecting and action. And, it provides a safe place to ask questions.

Connecting and Facing History, Volunteers Helped Organize...

Deepening Connections through Circles of Relationships

Our various circles provide opportunities for people to enter the conversation on race through activities they enjoy. Our Leadership Circle charts the bold path of our organization by creating programming that supports our vision, mission and goals. Our Book and Movie Circles bring people together to unravel old narratives and discover new ones, while our Healing, Reparations and Justice circles provide avenues to take action in our communities. The Facilitation, Newsletter and Special Events Circles serve as our frontline to the city, introducing

CTTT-RVA to the public. Regardless of their purpose, all of our working circle groups give individuals an opportunity to make new friends and actively engage in their own personal growth and community action.

All of our circles are currently staffed by volunteers committed to overcoming the legacy of enslavement especially in Richmond, VA. This is an awesome and ever growing circle of folks working to change the narrative and move toward the reality of a just and truthful society.



- Regular Monthly Gatherings Coordinated with Leaders Circle
- Work Group Circles – Work Hard and Meet As Needed
- Envisioned and Sometimes Working/Gathering as Resources Permit

And Take Healing and Restorative Actions

The Next Step

“Realizing that free time to volunteer extensively is a part of white privilege, we decided to try to live into our approach of “repairing what’s broken.”

Danita Green, our co-founder, volunteered her time and talents while holding down several paid jobs. So we asked, “What Impact can we make if CTTT-RVA had MORE of Danita’s time?” Realizing that free time to volunteer extensively is part of white privilege, we decided to try to live into our approach of “repairing what’s broken.” We are beginning by compensating Danita for her extensive talents and services. On July 1, 2019 Danita agreed to become full time paid Co-CEO. To live into our vision of reconciliation, co-founder Martha Rollins forgoes pay as an act of reparations – “repairing what is broken.” Bringing stories from very different life experiences, Danita and Martha are doing the challenging and rewarding work of living into a new narrative. Both Danita and Martha are thankful for their journey of friendship. Both are thankful for each person who has helped grow CTTT-RVA into the largest local CTTT group in the United States.



Living even more into reparations....

In support of CTTT-RVA's good work and its bold new step, Allison Thomas, a descendant of Robert King Carter of Virginia, offered a three year challenge grant of \$250,000. As Allison tells us in her own words:

“I can’t atone for all the sins of my ancestors. I can:

- Tell the full truth of my family history
- Fill in some blanks for linked descendants
- Be active in Coming To The Table
- Support CTTT-RVA
- Work for reparations at the local, state and national level

I am grateful for the opportunity to give the foundational grant to CTTT-RVA. They are a national model.

This is a legacy to be proud of and I hope you will join me in supporting Coming To The Table-Richmond.”



We Learn to Listen and Listen to Learn...

As we seek to “repair what is broken” we must remind ourselves that we can choose abundance – there is enough love, enough wealth, enough peace and enough power to go around. When you share all of these things, they grow exponentially.

We connect consistently and intentionally through our six monthly gatherings.

Of the three-dozen local affiliate groups across the United States, CTTT-RVA is the largest, engaging almost 1200 people online and approximately 300 city residents in facilitated conversations on race each month. On the second Wednesday (The Joyful Feast) and third Tuesday we gather for the “courageous, clumsy and often uncomfortable” conversations on race at two locations around town. We carefully select presenters and topics of interest that address trending and historic issues. By implementing the circle process and peace-building principles, our facilitators establish a safe space for constructive dialogue. We explore the challenges of reaching across racial lines literally at the dinner table – breaking down barriers and building bridges over a great potluck community meal. We have found that sharing our stories as we share family favorite recipes brings us closer together and makes healing possible.

We organize training opportunities for our volunteers who want to become facilitators of courageous, clumsy conversations about racial issues.

CTTT-RVA had 24 members attend the CTTT National Gatherings and 8 facilitators to participate in the Summer Peace Building Institute training at Eastern Mennonite University. These opportunities strengthened old and cultivated new relationships while grounding us in CTTT principles and practices. Since 2017, we have held three weekend facilitator-training retreats and provided monthly facilitator training with Dr. Bonnie Dowdy.

We are answering the call to seed Coming To The Table chapters throughout our region.

The success of our RVA chapter has enabled us to assist in creating new chapters in neighboring cities. From Charlottesville to Fredericksburg to the Historic Virginia Triangle, CTTT-RVA has provided valuable annual training and resources to those interested in joining the Coming To The Table family. Our leadership travels regularly to these cities, offering coaching and participating on panels and tours. Currently, we are supporting the establishment of CTTT chapters in Ashland and Petersburg.



We Share Our Vision of a Truthful and Just Society with our Wider Community

By offering pilgrimages and tours, we assist individuals in learning a more inclusive history:

- Organized and led *Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope* thru Hampton Roads area and Sankofa Festival.
- Partnered with Living Legacy for a Civil Rights tour through Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee.
- Led two group tours to the National Museum of African American History and Culture.
- Organized multiple local area tours of Black History Museum, American Civil War Museum, Virginia Museum of History and Culture, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Trail of Enslaved Africans, Library of Virginia.

By organizing special events with the wider Richmond community, we learn and develop more truthful narratives:

- **January 2019** – Organized a National Day of Racial Healing 2019 Observance at VMHC screening of *A Moral Debt: The Legacy of Enslavement in the USA* (featuring CTTT)
- **May** – Organized at VMHC *Repairing What is Broken* event featuring Ken Woodley, author of *THE ROAD TO HEALING*, followed by panel discussion with Viola Baskerville and Reggie Gordon.



- **October** – Organized GREAT FORCE intergenerational dinner gathering and discussion on “activism” held at The Institute for Contemporary Art (VCU).
- **October** – Organized and facilitated a citywide book discussion of *THE WATER DANCER* by Ta-Nehisi Coates at American Civil War Museum.
- **November** – Hosted a special connecting dinner prepared by CTTT-RVA food circle – *A Table of African American Fusions*.
- **January 2020** – Organized National Day of Racial Healing 2020 observance at VMHC – *Repairing the Breach: History, Religion and the Racial Divide* panel featuring Ed Ayers, Brian Blount, David Ragland and Corey Walker.
- **January** – Organized and facilitated a *Faith, Education and Reparations Forum* at Union Presbyterian Seminary.
- **January** – Organized two invitational screenings (150 people) of *JUST MERCY* at Bowtie Theater followed by facilitated conversations (100 people) at Kitchen 64.



Founding Volunteers and Community Partners

VOLUNTEERS

Ron Alpern	Georgianne Ginder	Sunni Southward	First Mennonite Church
Julie Appleby	Barbara Gottlieb	Jean Spencer	First Unitarian Universalist Church
Shelton Artis	Charles Grant	Doug Steele	Ginter Park Presbyterian Church
Clyde Bailey	Wade Green	Jerry and Karen Swerling	Joyful Feast
Janine Bell	Rich Green	Raymond Tademy	Love Locked Down Theater Project
Cynthia Brown	Jesse Johnson	Dreama Terrill	Nutty Buttery
Maria Brown	Will Hairston	Allison Thomas	Pine Camp
Jon Carlson	Yvonne Haynes	Christopher Tweel	Presbytery of The James
Lee Cannossa	Linda Higgins	Rusty Vaughn	Richmond Hill
Betsy Carr	Brett Hoag	John Vest	Shepherd Center
Art Carter	Pam Karthik	Anne Westrick	St. Johns United Church of Christ
Lorna Charlton	Brent and Carla Keyes	Nancy and Marty Wein	Union Presbyterian Seminary
Paige Chargois	Phoebe Kilby	Winnie Westbrook	University of Richmond
Elizabeth Charity	Greg Kimball	Willie Woodson	Virginia Commonwealth University/ICA
Mary Conner	Charles* and Mae Layne	Eleanor Workman	Virginia Department of Health/Crater District
Deedee Damschroder	Marcus Leonard	* deceased	Virginia Museum of History and Culture
Kathy Davis	Roslyn Lincoln*		
Lynda Davis	Clarence McGill	COMMUNITY PARTNERS	
Adrienne Dery	Sharon Morgan	American Civil War Museum	
Tom DeWolfe	Steve and Wendy Northup	Child Savers	
Deborah Dowell	Beblon Parks	Coming To The Table (National)	
John Ehrmantrout	Ashley Pelli	Coming To The Table Virginia Triangle	
Lillie Estes*	Nelson Reveley	Elegba Folklore Society	
James Evans	Randy Rollins	Faith Printing	
Midge Falconer	Lisa Salita	First Presbyterian Church	
Gary Flowers	Mariam Sankoh		VOLUNTEER CONSULTANTS
Peggy Fox	Charles Satchell		Bonnie Dowdy
Karen Franklin	Donna Scaturro*		James Gannon
	Bill Sizemore		Tina Slaughter

“Coming To The Table-RVA has been a wonderful support and help in adding diversity to the Shepherd’s Center membership and leadership. I enjoy being a part of this learning community and making connections. It’s made a difference in our organization.”

– Jim Evans, The Shepherd’s Center

Investors in The Vision

\$10,000 +

Anonymous
Allison Thomas
Martha Rollins

\$2,000-\$9,999

Presbyterian Synod of the
Mid Atlantic
Presbytery of the James
First Unitarian Universalist
Church
Randy Rollins

\$1,000-\$1,999

Viola Baskerville
Kathryn and Bob Davis
Charlotte Davenport
Charles and May Fox
Nancy Gottwald
Monroe and Jill Harris
Cal and George Jennison
Steve Slaughter
Marsha and Charlie
Summers
Darren and Deb Utley
James and Bobbi Ukrop

\$500-\$999

Margaret Bowles
Meta and John Braymer
Adrienne R Dery
Bonnie and Melvin Dowdy
James Evans
Danita Green
Mary Johns

Betty and Ken King
Candace Osdene
Virginia Historical Society
Bill Tattersall
Mary Zeugner

\$100-\$499

Penny Adams
Ron Alpern
Julie Appleby
Laura Bateman
Kathleen Bozis
Barbara Brown
Maria Brown
David and Hannah Burling
John and Mary Collins
Margaret Falconer
David Fauri
Susan Ferrell
Charles Grant
Anne Gordon Harrison
Pauline King
Brian Little
Melissa Mottola
Stephen and Wendy
Northup
Dudley Olsson
David Peake
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Thriving Life
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Co-CEO
Martha Rollins, Co-CEO

VOLUNTEER FOUNDING TEAM

Danita Rountree Green
Martha Rollins
Darren Utley
Hayat Bain
Meta Braymer
Barbara Brown
Cheryl Goode
Joshua Stepney
Marsha Summers

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“I am moved. I am startled by what I saw and heard because I have never been so clearly made aware of my own implicit bias. I have a lot of work to do in order to do my part to change how we live in this world. I START NOW!”

– CTTT-RVA Program Participant

From The National Day of Racial Healing, January 21 -22, 2020

“What a wonderful panel!! I’m starting to hear things I’ve never heard before in a context I’ve never experienced. Thank you!”

– Jeanine Tate

“As a member of CTTT for the past three years, I feel that I have developed some lasting relationships and a sense of trust with persons of very diverse backgrounds. I continue to participate in CTTT activities, events and trips because in addition to learning, I am also able to experience a wider circle of family love from my new relationships.”

– Barbara Brown

“Rich and most informative conversation! I kept going back because I learned so much from the variety of perspectives expressed around the table. Now, I stay involved not just for those nuggets of insight but also because of the wonderful people I have met and the friendships I’ve developed volunteering and sharing meals, thoughts and experiences with the CTTT-RVA community. This group has helped me be a more informed and effective ally and advocate for racial justice in my own county and beyond.”

– Kathy Davis, Facilitator circle and Food team

“The CTTT-RVA experience was inspiring! The concept of CTTT is profound, proactive and professionally executed. The questions, in my opinion, were easy to engage and prompted introspection. ...a new experience of intergenerational dialog. Their approach creates a safe space to engage in challenging conversations, address complicated concerns and dissect historically convoluted conceptions.”

– P Branch, VCU, Arts in Healthcare