

# VRC News – April, 2022

1. Our Coalition will present as part of a community project on diversity, equity, and inclusion in DeLand and Volusia County. This program, ***Inclusive DeLand***, is funded by a grant written by Savannah-Jane Griffin, formerly of Stetson and now Executive Director of the Neighborhood Center in DeLand. The City of DeLand, Volusia County, and Mainstreet DeLand are sponsors.



After discussion about the accuracy of the phrase, “healing history,” a phrase we and others have used (see below), our Steering Committee approved participation. Our slot is **May 23, 5:30-7:00**. **Daisy Grimes** was recommended as a presenter, along with **Rina Arroyo**. (Both have agreed!) Reggie, Grady, Felicia, among others will attend. (All are welcome.) This is an important opportunity for us to engage the wider public in our work for social justice. (Sharon reminds us that this Monday event follows a busy weekend of events at AAMA celebrating Florida Emancipation Day. Details below.)

2. Steering Committee set the date for our **next Soil Collection Ceremony**, honoring **Mr. Charles Harris** and **Mr. Anthony Johnson** (September 17, 1896). These working men were accused of assaulting the young daughter of their employer, James Bruce; arrested on that charge; abducted by a White mob from the custody of deputies en route to the county jail in DeLand, and lynched **near Maytown**. Their bodies were then riddled with bullets and left on display for two days.

EJI suggests soil collection about four miles toward DeLand on the old Maytown-Osteen Road. This is a rural area roughly between Osteen and Oak

Hill, near the border of Volusia and Brevard counties. Ceremonies and Education Committees will take the lead. Volunteers for research into the lives of these men or of the times in Volusia County and those willing to help in planning and hosting the ceremony should contact Daisy Grimes or Felicia Benzo, chairs of those committees. **We are excited to plan our Soil Ceremony for Saturday September 17, 2022, the day their lives were taken 126 years ago.**

3. Steering confirmed that we should prepare now to move forward on **bringing our communities into our “hard conversations” about race. How best to do that?** Daisy, Sam, Rina, and Rick will seek a follow-up meeting of Bethune Cookman and Stetson University students. Our Inclusive DeLand participation can also move us in this direction. Felicia reports that the Education Committee has been invited to speak at one of Sam Houston’s Stetson classes. We all need to think about a plan for hosting or joining in small group conversations in our communities, workplaces, social and political organizations, faith communities. **Please come with ideas for that work.**
4. Some quick announcements. (We can provide details and discuss, on request, at our next meeting)
  - A. Our program officer, **Trey Walk**, has informed us that he has resigned from EJI. He salutes us for our work, and hopes to follow our progress by remaining on our mailing list. We sent him, in reply, our thanks for all he did to encourage and guide us. We continue to work with **Gabrielle Daniels**.
  - B. Two VRC members recently toured the **National Memorial for Peace and Justice** and were moved to see, by luck, **Mr. Lee Snell’s Jar on display**. **Mr. Lee Bailey’s Jar** has now also arrived at the National Memorial! We look forward to reports of seeing him honored there. But remember that with over 4400 lynchings, the jars will be rotated and on any given trip, you might not see our Volusia brothers. But again, you might, and what strong emotion you’ll feel!
  - C. **Moses Sun**, a well-known artist from Seattle (one of his projects there was the BLM street mural, a community-art collective collaboration), has been contracted through a Stetson grant to meet with the community, design and paint a **mural at Dr. Noble “Thin Man” Watts Amphitheater**. Mary Allen, AAMA Director, reports that the design—a true “wow!”—has been approved by the city’s mural committee. Sun recently gave a tour of his gallery and talk about his art in a virtual lecture (Zoom) hosted by Stetson’s Creative Arts Faculty (Luca Molnar,

Katie Brecinczi, and others.) Sun’s trip has been delayed several times, by COVID and the mural approval process, but we look forward to his being here from April 18-28. While here, Sun may also speak (in person, at the amphitheater) to Stetson students, AAMA board members, and others, as space permits.

- D. **Stetson student Emily Keck** presented her Senior Project, a digital story entitled “Volusia County History: Racial Terror and Black Resilience,” at the University’s annual Showcase of undergraduate research. EJI and VRC research contributed to her presentation. VRC member Sidney Johnston was an especially important source as were Andy Eisen and Rick Buckelew. Here’s a link to her latest draft, which won the Leonard Nance Award for outstanding research. Emily welcomes comments—to [grady.ballenger@stetson.edu](mailto:grady.ballenger@stetson.edu) or directly to [ekeck@stetson.edu](mailto:ekeck@stetson.edu). If you have trouble clicking above, try the address <https://arcg.is/1aSDTK1>



[Volusia County History: Racial Terror and Black Resilience](#)

This project details the stories of racial violence victims within Volusia County, FL, and shares stories of resilience from Black citizens.

[arcg.is](https://arcg.is)

- E. Our EJI sister organization in Jacksonville has placed their **904ward Race Cards** on app stores for Apple and Android Devices. There is no charge, though donations are welcome. (Please list yourself as a VRC member!). The cards may be valuable for self-reflection or for leading “hard conversations.”
- F. Evan Keller has led development of a card to encourage the right kind of thinking for participants of “hard conversations.” He has offered the card to us, with VRC’s logo:



## When facing our hard history, it is ....

not progressive to:	healing to:	not right to:
Judge an entire race by their worst forebears. --- Ignore the good traits, values, and history of our country. --- Point a self-righteous finger rather than being continuously self-reflective. --- Punish with shame rather than building bridges with love. --- Forget that loving our neighbors includes those we disagree with.	Leave our respective media echo chambers and build face-to-face friendships to create equitable solutions for all. --- Listen to understand and empathize. --- Grow our resilience for hard conversations that speak the truth in love. --- Realize how the past shapes the present. --- Look closely at the blindspots of history to humbly self-reflect and choose a better path.	Default to defensiveness and denial rather than humbly learning from our hard history. --- Gloss over hard truths of centuries -long dehumanizing of people for profit. --- Conflate telling the truth with being divisive. --- Judge whether others should be in pain rather than weeping with those who weep. --- See everything through an us-vs-them political lens rather than realizing that we can all win together.
Let's get on the same page so that together we can turn the page into a better future for all.		
written by Evan Keller and formatted by Nadine Navetta		

- G. Look for details soon, from AAMA's executive director Mary Allen, on a weekend of events commemorating **Florida Emancipation Day (May 20<sup>th</sup>)** and bringing to life the history of this day and its importance for Black Floridians, along with Juneteenth, a day celebrated nationally as the date when news of emancipation finally reached enslaved people in the deepest South, Galveston, Texas. (That long delay is a reminder of a dream deferred!)
- H. Following our Steering Committee discussion about the phrase "healing history," Evan reported on a proposed **Alabama state law, Senate Bill 327, the Healing History Act**, which lists *specific actions* to *acknowledge* the history of racism and to *begin* repairing its damage over centuries. Here, Evan shares a resolution-prayer by an Alabama legislator. The bill did not come forward for a final vote this year—but will come up again next year.

Friends, Alabama is voting next week on the Healing History Act. Interesting title, eh? The below resolution addresses whether and how history can be healed. The proposed bill itself is also attached, if interested. It would, among other

things, commission a statue of John Lewis to be installed at the Edmund Pettis Bridge as well as renaming said bridge. Thanks, Evan

### **Healing History** (*slightly condensed*)

Whereas, We are in a defining moment in America and Alabama history. As a people, we can choose conflict or collaboration around historical monuments as well as narratives about our history. As Alabamians we choose to embrace all of our history in truth and love for the purpose of healing together to move forward.

Let us Heal History

As we move to heal our history, there are long standing principles that the founding fathers and mothers of our liberties stood firmly on, throughout the different fights for freedom, from 1776 to 1965 and beyond.

Let Us Heal History

The principle from our great American Pledge of Allegiance, One Nation, under God, Indivisible, with liberty and justice for all is one such principle. The essence of these words are stitched through our history, from the declaration of independence, through our Constitutional framework, to the commitment and calls of the American people.

Let Us Heal History

It is in our Godly Oneness that we will find that we have all the excellence, skill, and resources we need to heal our state.

Let Us Heal History

As we heal history, the Alabama motto, We dare defend our rights, takes on new meaning, for all Alabamians we seek to defend each other rights as Alabamians.

Let us Heal History

Nearly three score years ago Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his prophetic visionary "I have a Dream Speech" in the capital of our nation featuring Alabama. Since that time many Alabamians and organizations have worked to make the dream come true in our state. Dr. King and the foot soldiers dream is called the Beloved Community.

Let us Heal History

In the fullness of time, all things can work together for the good of Alabama. In this season, as we reflect on the Selma to Montgomery March, 57 years ago, the refrain on the Alabama capital steps was "How long, not long". Now let us enter into an Era of Healing History in honor of all those who gave or risked their lives for freedom.

## Let Us Heal History

As we endeavor to heal our history, we must no longer see things from the eyes of conflict but from compassion, cooperation, and collaboration. We understand that seeing our history from conflict creates chaos and confusion. God is not the author of confusion. The better way is to embrace each other at the table of brotherhood and sisterhood and to invite all God's children to the table.

## Let Us Heal History

Healing History is to finally judge each Alabamian by the content of their character and acknowledge that this goes both ways, across race, status, and all the things that make us different and wonderfully made by our Creator. . .

## Let Us Heal History

One might ask how can we heal history, when history is in the past? We can do this by reframing the way we see history as something to learn from, not feared. We can acknowledge that what we do now will effect 50 years from now and beyond and make choices in the light of what we have learned together. We must take this knowledge and build the Alabama Beloved Community--where all Alabamians are encouraged and supported to flourish.

## Let Us Heal History

We can learn from our past to build a better present. Healing History puts us in touch with our true values as a state.

## Let us Heal History

Now let us share our history in truth and in love in a way that heals us all. We encourage each man, woman, and child to learn more about our collective history with one another. And in doing so if it is repentance that God leads us to, let us repent; if forgiveness, let us forgive, if it is to be more just with one another, let us act more justly, if humility, then let us be more humble. Let each of us, as we heal, follow the lead of the one who created us all in His image and likeness. .

## Let Us Heal History

Let us commence the Alabama Healing History Campaign to reflect on the old Landmark. From henceforth, Alabama will embrace all of our history for the purpose of healing as a pathway forward to a brighter future for our posterity.

- I. *West Volusia Beacon* issue of this week (Vol. 11, No. 12) has an interesting column by DeLand resident **Karen Ryder**, author of a local history called "Better Country Beyond." This piece, with photos from the day, comes from that book and is entitled "**Black pioneers' efforts**

- were often overlooked: Work of ‘faceless toilers’ was key to creating our towns.”** It’s helpful background to the lives of agricultural workers, including Lee Bailey, Charles Harris, and Anthony Johnson.
- J. Thanks to an alert from Jody Williams, several VRC members attended to **Gilbert King’s lecture, via Zoom, on April 12 for a Florida ACLU** sponsored series of talks. King’s focus, once again, was on confronting the racial past in order to build a more just present. From ACLU: “The integrity of the state’s judicial system relies on correcting the gross injustices of the past. During the conversation, Gilbert King will discuss the impact the school-to-prison pipeline and America’s over-reliance on mass incarceration has on Black communities in Florida, and how these injustices are rooted in centuries of systemic racism and discrimination.” King is the author of two works on Florida’s racial history, “Beneath a Ruthless Sun” and “Devil in the Grove.” The latter was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction in 2013.
- K. And perhaps the most important news of the recent past: **federal anti-lynching legislation finally passed Congress and was signed into law by President Biden.** You can look up the video with speeches by the President and Vice President Harris as well as Ida B. Wells’s granddaughter. But here is the text of the President’s remarks. Note that he connects the Emmett Till Anti-Lynching Act (2022) to the work of Bryan Stevenson and EJL, a work we’re honored to be a small part of.

### **Remarks by President Biden at Signing of H.R. 55, the Emmett Till Antilynching Act**

MARCH 29, 2022 • Rose Garden 4:11 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: (The bill is signed.) All right. It’s law. (Applause.) (The President moves to the podium.) . . . I just signed into law the Emmett Till Antilynching Act, making lynching — (applause) — a federal hate crime for the first time in American history.

I want to thank Vice President Harris who was a key co-sponsor of this bill when she was a United States senator. (Applause.)vAnd I also want to thank Speaker Pelosi and Leader Schumer and members of the Congress here today, especially Congressman Hoyer and Bobby Rush, Senator Dick Durbin and Cory Booker. (Applause.) I — I also want to thank Senator Tim Scott, who couldn’t be here today.

And the civil rights leaders gathered here today and, most of all, the family of Emmett Till and Ida B. Wells: Thank you for never giving up. Never, ever giving up. (Applause.)

Matter of fact, her [great]-granddaughter told me that her mother was here — when? —

MS. DUSTER: (Inaudible.)

THE PRESIDENT: — I mean, your [great]-grandmother was here — when? —

MS. DUSTER: It was in 1898.

THE PRESIDENT: In 1898, in order to make a case for the antilynching law. It was over 100 years ago, in 1900, when a North Carolina Representative named George Henry White — the son of a slave; the only Black lawmaker in Congress at the time — who first introduced legislation to make lynching a federal crime.

Hundreds — hundreds of similar bills have failed to pass.

Over the years, several federal hate crime laws were enacted, including one I signed last year to combat COVID-19 hate crimes. But no federal law — no federal law expressly prohibited lynching. None. Until today. (Applause.)

One of the leading chronicles of our history of lynching is Bryan Stevenson, who happens to be a Delawarean from my home state, who wanted very much to be here today but he could not.

He helped build the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama — America's first site dedicated to understanding the legacy of lynching.

You know, his extensive research showed that between 1877 and 1950, more than 4,400 Black people were murdered by lynching, most in the South but some in the North as well. That's a lot of folks, man, and a lot of silence for a long time.

Lynching was pure terror to enforce the lie that not everyone — not everyone belongs in America and not everyone is created equal; terror to systematically undermine hard — hard-fought civil rights; terror not just in the dark of the night but in broad daylight.

Innocent men, women, and children hung by nooses from trees. Bodies burned and drowned and castrated.



Their crimes? Trying to vote. Trying to go to school. To try and own a business or preach the Gospel. False accusations of murder, arson, and robbery. Simply being Black.

Often the crowds of white families gathered to celebrate the spectacle, taking pictures of the bodies and mailing them as postcards.

Emmett Till was an only child. He grew up on the South Side of Chicago with his mother, Mamie, and grandparents and cousins.

In the summer of 1955, Emmett turned 14 years old, ready to start eighth grade in the fall. Before school started, he wanted to visit his cousins in Mississippi. So Emmett's mom dropped him off at the train station in Chicago. Her own family fled the Delta decades earlier, so she told him — she told him the unwritten rules he had to follow. Quote, "Be very careful how you speak. Say 'yes sir' and 'no ma'am', and do not hesitate to be — to humble yourself if you have to get down on your knees". End of quote.

That same speech, that same admonition — too many Black parents today still have to use that admonition. They have to tell their children when it comes to encounters with the law enforcement. You know, and so many other circumstances.

She kissed Emmett goodbye. It was the last time she saw her son alive.

Days after he arrived in Mississippi, Emmett's mutilated body was found in a river, barbed wire tied around his neck and a 75-pound cotton gin fan attached to that wire as he was thrown into the river.

Emmett's mother — his mother demanded that her son be sent home so that his funeral in Chicago could be an open casket. Here's what she said: "Let the people see what I've seen." America and the world saw what she saw.

Emmett Till was born nearly 40 years ago after the first antilynching law was introduced. Although he was one of thousands who were lynched, his mother courage — his mother's courage to show the world what was done to him energized the Civil Rights Movement.

Exactly 100 days later, Rosa Parks was arrested on the bus in Montgomery. Her statue sits in my office. She said, "I thought of Emmett Till and I couldn't go back." "I thought of Emmett Till and I couldn't go back."

Dr. King often preached about, quote, “the crying voices of little Emmett Till, screaming from the rushes of the Mississippi.”

To the Till family: We remain in awe of your courage to find purpose through your pain. To find purpose to through your pain. But the law is not just about the past, it’s about the present and our future as well.

From the bullets in the back of Ahmaud Arbery to countless other acts of violence — countless victims known and unknown — the same racial hatred that drove the mob to hang a noose brought that mob carrying torches out of the fields of Charlottesville just a few years go.

Racial hate isn’t an old problem; it’s a persistent problem. A persistent problem. And I know many of the civil rights leaders here know, and you heard me say it a hundred times: Hate never goes away; it only hides. It hides under the rocks. And given just a little bit of oxygen, it comes roaring back out, screaming. But what stops it is all of us, not a few. All of us have to stop it.

People like Ida B. Wells, one of the founders of the NAACP, established 100 years ago in response to racial terror across the country. A brilliant, gifted writer, she exposed the barbaric nature of lyn- — of lynching as a tool to intimidate and subjugate Black Americans.

And her words, her courage, her convictions — she was trying to prevent the murders of Emmett Till and Ahmaud Arbery, and so many others — over 4,400 others.

Ida B. — Ida B. Wells once said, quote, “The way to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon the wrongs.” “Turn the light of truth upon the wrongs.”

That’s what all of you have done, gathered in this Rose Garden, with this bill and so much more, including Ida B. Wells’s great-granddaughter, Michelle Duster, whom I’m honored to introduce to mark this historic day. . . .

#### **L. Other Announcements from the meeting: Quilt Update**