



NATIONAL
AFRICAN-AMERICAN
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National Groups Join Reparatory Justice Initiative in Elaine, Arkansas ***Sacred Commemoration Service of Remembrance Is Planned***

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 5, 2020 — On the evening of September 30, 1919, African American families had gathered at the Hoop Spur Church in Elaine, AR to discuss the ways in which Black farm owners and sharecroppers could receive fair prices for their cotton and labor. White local authorities learned of the meeting and shot into the church.

The result was one of the bloodiest massacres in U.S. history. Hundreds of Blacks died, many were incarcerated and some were lynched. Hundreds fled for their lives as the violence against Blacks went from Elaine through Phillips County and throughout other Arkansas counties.

Richard Wright, author of the iconic novel *Native Son*, would pen his childhood memories of the terror, his remembrance of his uncle's earlier lynching and the on-going racism in this nation. In this era of Black Lives Matter, the legacy of the Elaine Massacre continues to impact families who still live there and many who left. The demand for America's reckoning with this history and reparations for the harm caused are alive and tenacious.

The Center has planted the seeds for restitution and spiritual healing of individual families and a community. "The goal is for all of us to have good incomes and wealth accumulation as we honor our Delta heritage and our fore parents," explained James White, ELC Director of Programs and a Descendant of 1919. "We lost everything and have been living in poverty ever since. It is time for reparations, restitution, and ending the fear that has traumatized us for over 100 years."

The ELC leadership has cast a vision to restore The Elaine Museum and Civil Rights Center, housing collections of information and visual oral histories. This building was at the center of much of the mob activity in 1919 and is now on the National Register of Historic Places. The Center will embark upon a community economic project to include a historical village that is a center of Delta spirituality, culture, arts, music, and education. The plan includes development of a memorial park, small businesses, housing and a convention center.

In December, 2020 a long-overdue public event will be held as a collaboration to include the Elaine Legacy Center, Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, National African American Reparations Commission and Fund for Reparations Now. A sacred commemoration service will be held as a tribute to Silas Hoskins, author Richard Wright's favorite uncle, with whom he was living when Hoskins was lynched.

Wright was nine when he and his family escaped from Elaine as word went out that they were the next to be lynched. Wright escaped but his uncle never had a burial, a homegoing, or last rites. The descendants of the Elaine Massacre, along with their partners have declared, “Hoskins will have a homegoing service of remembrance in 2020.” Also, the annual “Healing of the Land” service in Elaine will begin the establishment of an expanded Memorial Park and a sculpture garden.

Enter a group of national organizations, the National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC), the Fund for Reparations Now (FFRN), an affiliate of NAARC, and the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference (SDPC), to stand with the descendants of the massacre in their quest for justice.

The Elaine Legacy Center (ELC) has been the epicenter of sacred memory, representing the stories and interests of those who experienced harm, the community at large and other affected individuals.

The Elaine Collaboration began in 2019 when the SDPC hosted a Truth Seeking Commission hearing (<https://secure.everyaction.com/fWSSzF5bOk658FwS6KchVg2>) in Elaine. Speakers at the hearing recounted oral histories of violence, death, pain, and stolen land.

Almost all African Americans living in the Elaine area are descendants of massacred families. Projects of this collaboration will be a model for reparatory justice and reparations remedies in the U.S. Dr. Carruthers, General Secretary of the SDPC indicated “we will begin now and assist in rolling out the project in specific phases. Elaine was the epicenter of racial violence in the Delta in the 20th century and will be the epicenter of reparations in the Delta in the 21st century.”

Other partners have already indicated their intent to strongly support the vision of the ELC, including FFRN and McCormick Theological Seminary. David Gardinier, a young white ally of the reparations movement and founder of FFRN, said: “white allies have an obligation to find respectful ways to right the wrongs African Americans have endured. FFRN will work to secure financial and human resources in support of the priorities outlined by ELC.”

Dr. Ron Daniels, Convener of NAARC, commented: “The reparations initiative in Elaine, AK reveals the trans-generational harm that African American communities have suffered over centuries, along with a determination and resiliency for justice that will not go away until reparative justice is a reality. NAARC is committed to sharing its expertise and journey with the Elaine community and other communities that has suffered similar fates across this nation.”

The Elaine Legacy Center began as one of four centers of Waves of Prayer in Elaine. It is now a recognized nonprofit with 501c3 status. Board members are Williams Quiney III, chair; Fay Duncan-Daniel, Bertha Glasgow, Lenora Marshall, Mary Olson, James White. All are descendants of the massacre living in the area except The Rev. Dr. Mary Olson, a United Methodist clergyperson appointed to work in the area. (<http://www.elainelegacycenter.org>)

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