



# Toward Transformative Reparations

**Rob Corcoran**, Program  
Design & Training Consultant,  
Initiatives of Change  
International

**Mike Wenger**, AAC&U,  
senior fellow at the American  
Association of Colleges and  
Universities

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***“Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them.”***

— Former President George W. Bush

***“...we can move beyond some of our old racial wounds.... America can change. That is the true genius of this nation.”***

— Former President Barack Obama

# The Authors' Perspectives

## Rob Corcoran

As a White American of British birth, I am acutely aware of my ancestors' horrific record of colonialism and transatlantic slavery. My home was in Richmond, Virginia, for nearly 40 years and my perspectives are shaped by the practical experience of working with people of all races and walks of life whose courageous actions are bringing healing and building a new vision for a city scarred by a history of slavery, civil war, and segregation. Together we built a diverse, multisector team that led to Richmond's becoming the first U.S. city to publicly and formally acknowledge its racial history and begin to have an honest conversation about its legacy of exclusion and inequity. Principles applied there have informed similar efforts across the U.S.A. and on every continent.

## Mike Wenger

As a college student in the early 1960s, I was involved in the Civil Rights Movement, both on the campus of Queens College of the City University of New York, and in the South, specifically in Prince Edward County, Virginia. In 1997 and 1998, after a lengthy career as a community organizer and local and state government official, I served as a deputy director for President Clinton's Initiative on Race. Subsequently, I worked at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, taught race relations and institutional racism at George Washington University, and served as a consultant to the W. K. Kellogg Foundation as it evolved into an anti-racist philanthropy. On a personal level, I continue to learn first-hand about racism from my African American children and grandchildren.

*More complete biographical sketches of the authors can be found at the end of this article.*

*The opinions expressed in this document are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect any official positions of any organization with which the authors are affiliated.*

Since its inception, the National Collaborative for Health Equity (NCHE) has dedicated its programs and activities to creating health equity in the United States by ending racial and ethnic health inequities. NCHE's leadership, staff, and consultants always recognized that ending racism requires achieving and sustaining meaningful progress toward this goal. Beginning in 2020, NCHE joined over 150 other nonprofit and philanthropic organizations in leveraging the pillars of the Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT) Framework to inform programs, policy research, and action. These five pillars (Narrative Change, Racial Healing and Relationship Building, Separation, Law, and the Economy) offer a comprehensive and holistic conceptual framework for action to end racism and jettison the deeply embedded belief in a false hierarchy of human values.

NCHE's vision is embodied in our name. We work in collaboration with others to help our nation achieve health equity. NCHE's mission is to promote health equity by harnessing data, developing leaders, and catalyzing partnerships across the many sectors that share responsibility for creating a more equitable and just society. As NCHE continues to collaborate with others, we implement three key strategies: (1) Supporting Leaders, (2) Applying Data Research and Information, and (3) Expanding the TRHT Movement. NCHE equips institutions and leaders to work effectively with and within historically marginalized and excluded communities, providing tools to help improve the social, economic, and environmental conditions that shape health. We help organizations and communities to envision and actualize an America that has faced and redressed historic and contemporary effects of racism in all its forms.

I am pleased to present this new collection of briefs offering insights into each TRHT pillar. Leaders, practitioners, and researchers can utilize these resources committed to overcoming the unique racial history and legacy of the United States.

The original organizations that participated in the design phase of TRHT in 2016 were included in a platform created by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, *Connected Communities*. Based on preliminary Connected Communities research, these participating organizations and representatives from over 150 nonprofit entities could reach over 189,000,000 people in the United States. A lot has happened since 2016. The momentum continues to increase for the expansion of local and national efforts to address and heal from the historic and contemporary effects of racism.

While the potential of reaching almost 200 million people has yet to be realized, recent surveys suggest that tens of millions are aware of the effort, and the work continues to expand. As the momentum has increased, resistance and backlash to this progress grows. The resources or tools provided in these briefs can help leaders, practitioners, and researchers maintain momentum in the face of resistance.

There are many consequences of chronic exposure to structural racism and racial discrimination. The most insidious consequences are disease and health inequities. Our failure to effectively address and redress America's legacy of racial hierarchy has economic costs that reach well into trillions of dollars for our society. But it is communities of color that bear the lion's share of the burden of the costs of failing to eliminate racism and its consequences. The courageous and dedicated work of leaders in communities across America provides hope that we will succeed in overcoming racism. We offer these resources as support for these ongoing efforts.

*Sincerely,*



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gail C. Christopher".

Gail C. Christopher  
Executive Director  
National Collaborative for Health Equity

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# 1.

## Introduction

On July 18, 2022, a delegation from the Global Circle for Reparations and Healing, led by Kamm Howard, a Chicago businessman and director of Reparations United, and including Dr. Ron Daniels, convenor of the National African American Reparations Commission, and Nikole Hannah-Jones, author of the “1619 Project,”<sup>1</sup> met with Bishop Paul Tighe, secretary of the Pontifical Council of Culture, at the Vatican. The purpose of the meeting was to begin a dialogue with the Catholic Church on its role in supporting and benefiting from the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its legacy. During the meeting they delivered a Presentment outlining the harms and offenses of the Church, the legacy resulting from those harms and offenses, and reparations measures that are needed for full repair and healing. The Presentment calls on “the Holy See...to urgently lead the world in building a global culture of repair and healing and otherwise taking transformative action for Africa and its worldwide Diaspora...”<sup>2</sup>

One week later, on July 25, 2022, Pope Francis issued an historic apology for the ways in which many members of the Church cooperated in Canada’s “catastrophic” policy of Indigenous residential schools, 60 percent of which were run by the Church, saying that the forced assimilation of Indigenous peoples into Christian society destroyed their culture, severed families,

and marginalized communities. “In the face of this deplorable evil, the Church kneels before God and implores his forgiveness for the sins of her children.”<sup>3</sup>

The meeting at the Vatican and the subsequent apology for the Catholic Church’s role in Canada’s “catastrophic” policy represent powerful milestones in the decades-long effort to obtain reparations both for those of African descent who have been harmed by the enslavement of their ancestors and the legacy of that enslavement and for Indigenous people who have been similarly oppressed. We believe these events represent potentially significant steps forward in the quest for justice and accountability for the sins of the past. We especially applaud the global reparations leaders for stressing the dual importance of “repair and healing.” Pursuing both goals simultaneously can enable us to achieve the “transformative action” they seek. Ultimately, this can transform societies founded on the false hierarchy of human value based on superficial physical characteristics such as skin color and facial features into societies in which we all embrace our common humanity.

While we recognize that the concept of reparations is a global issue, the focus of this paper is on reparations in the United States. However, as

we consider reparations in this country, it may be instructive to look first at what we can learn from Australia and Canada, two countries not dissimilar from the United States, which also are dealing with issues of reparations. Informed by their experiences, we will make the case for what we are calling “Transformative Reparations” in the United States.

**We believe that for reparations to truly achieve both “repair and healing,” monetary compensation is essential but not sufficient. Activities designed to meaningfully bridge our divisions, heal from the wounds of our past, and usher in a just and enduring future will strengthen the advocacy for monetary compensation. Furthermore, in the United States, transformative reparations must include Indigenous people, in addition to descendants of enslaved people.**

It should be noted that, inasmuch as racial/ethnic divisions are a key factor in today’s growing political polarization, “transformative reparations” can be a foundational piece of saving our democracy. They will help us to create a more egalitarian society in which we honor the dignity and full humanity of every person and welcome their contributions to a shared vision for this country.

Several jurisdictions in the United States have recently recognized the need for and value of reparations for descendants of enslaved people. For example, the California Task Force on Reparations has issued an interim report that “provides an in-depth overview of the harms inflicted on African Americans in California and across the nation due to the ongoing legacy of slavery and systemic discrimination.”<sup>14</sup> In Evanston, Illinois, a reparations effort is focused on providing housing grants for African American residents. Other jurisdictions, from Providence, Rhode Island, to Asheville, North Carolina, are exploring the issue of reparations.

These efforts are justified and important, but they must be considered in the broader context of societal transformation. They must include atoning for our treatment, past and present, of Indigenous people, particularly with regard to stolen lands, frequent broken promises, and the emerging revelations about the atrocities committed at the residential schools in this country that sought to “civilize” Indigenous children. To effect this “civilizing,” Indigenous children were kidnapped from their parents and sent to boarding schools that, in the words of one boarding school official, sought to “kill the Indian, save the man.” The schools sought to strip children, often through violent discipline, of their Indian cultures, beliefs, value systems, religions, names, and languages.

Building trust and pursuing healing are (1) key building blocks in the quest for transformative reparations for African Americans and Indigenous people and (2) essential for creating an equitable and healthy racial environment for all Americans.

In this article, we will:

- Examine what we can learn from some international efforts, specifically in Australia and Canada;
- Explain why transformative reparations are essential to a United States future characterized by equity, justice, and healing for all;
- Describe two transformative processes that can help us to build mutual trust and embrace our common humanity, while at the same time atoning for the oppressions of the past;
- Enumerate a set of principles that will make success in communities throughout the country more likely and some key steps that can help drive the process; and
- Make the case that now is the time to act and that waiting any longer not only maintains injustice, but threatens our very democracy and the well-being of all Americans.

# 2.

## International Efforts

### Australia

Since the days of colonization, Australia's First Nations peoples have suffered dispossession, massacre, and imported disease. Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders were killed routinely throughout the nineteenth century, and their rights were only acknowledged by the High Court in 1993. The work for acknowledgement, truth-telling, healing, and equity has been a long-term effort. Indigenous communities led it as early as the 1930s, and then were joined by non-Indigenous Australians in a broad-based grassroots effort. In the late 1970s, historians began to record the extent of child removal and the first Link-Up service to bring together separated families began.

In 1987, Bob Hawke's Labour government proposed a compact or treaty to recognize the injustices suffered by Indigenous people. Mining interests fought trenchantly to stop this treaty, since it would hinder their freedom to mine, and Hawke abandoned his attempt. Instead, the federal government created an Aboriginal Council for Reconciliation with Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. This had a major impact on Australian attitudes. Study Circles were

held across the country in churches, universities, and libraries. Designed for use by community groups, they focused on the key issues identified by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation<sup>5</sup> as important for discussion and understanding in the reconciliation process: Highlighting the importance of the relationship with the land and sea for Aboriginals and Torres Straits Islanders; valuing cultural identity; building relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities based on an accurate understanding of the history of violence, dispossession, racism and removal of children; addressing poverty, inequities in health, housing, and levels of incarceration; and a formal document to address "unfinished business" and resolve the rights and position of Indigenous Australians. The following year, Paul Keating, the new Prime Minister, made the first official speech by an Australian leader acknowledging the harm of white settlement and separation of children.

A 1997 national Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission reported on the extent of damage caused by the policy of removing Indigenous children from their families and



placing them in White institutions, or with White families, in a misguided attempt to assimilate them into the majority White culture. The inquiry was led by Sir Ronald Wilson, a conservative High Court judge. After listening to the stories of 500 Indigenous people over two years, he said he was a “changed man” and that his eyes had been opened to things he had never understood before. His report, *Bringing Them Home*,<sup>6</sup> received widespread attention but was largely ignored by the government. In the absence of government action, ordinary Australians took responsibility. Historians provided important data, churches issued apologies, and the media spread the word widely and helped to build public support.

This remarkable display of public action led to the establishment of a national Sorry Day. A surprising and outspoken supporter of the Sorry campaign was former Liberal<sup>7</sup> prime minister Malcolm Fraser. On May 5, 2000, the front page of *The Age*, the main newspaper of Victoria, reported Fraser’s call for a much greater determination to address past wrongs. The history taught about Australia’s settlement was “not what happened,” he said. “The realities were in almost total contrast to what people were told.” Half a million people signed Sorry Books, and in 2000, nearly one million people walked in cities across the country—including 300,000 who walked in “The People’s Apology” over Sydney Harbour Bridge—to show support for new relations between First Nations and non-First Nations Australians. The people’s movement changed political attitudes, as was clear when in 2008 the incoming Labour Party prime minister Kevin Rudd made an unconditional apology, and this was supported unanimously by the Australian parliament.

Rudd laid out a clear program of change, funded with A\$5 billion (US\$3.5 billion) to transform the education, health, employment, and housing of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders, with the goal of ending the 17-year gap in life expectancy within a generation. The next Liberal government was resistant and reduced the level of funding support. But progress is being made. While the federal government focuses on social policy, individual reparations are the responsibility of states. Most states are taking action. Schools now teach more honest versions of history.

First Nations leaders recognize that genuine progress will only come through cooperation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people; yet, this is difficult, given the grim history. There is ongoing trauma, and out-of-home care for Indigenous children has almost doubled since 2007. But again, there is progress. *Sorry and Beyond: Healing the Stolen Generations* by Brian Butler, co-chair of the Sorry Day Committee, and John Bond, who served as Secretary, outlines both the progress and the challenges that remain, and records many survivor stories.<sup>8</sup>

In 2017, representatives of all First Nations communities came together in Uluru in the center of the country and issued a “Statement from the Heart,” which calls for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution and a Makarrata Commission to oversee a process of treaty-making and truth-telling. The Liberal government rejected it, but in 2022 the incoming Labour prime minister, Anthony Albanese, committed to the Statement “in full” and has begun a process of consultation with First Nations Leaders.

# Canada

In Canada, generations of Indigenous children experienced the trauma of being taken from their homes and communities. Their stories were never publicly acknowledged until survivors of the system brought their experiences to light in thousands of court cases culminating in the largest class-action lawsuit in Canada's history. A 1996 report by the Royal Commission on the Aboriginal People had urged Canadians to begin a process of reconciliation. Although its recommendations were ignored, it did begin to open the eyes of Canadians.

The implementation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement began on September 19, 2007. The agreement represents the consensus reached between legal counsel for former students, the churches, First Nations organizations, and the Government of Canada. It includes payment to former students; a process to address claims of sexual and physical abuse; support for healing programs; commemorative activities; and the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

On June 11, 2008, on behalf of the Government of Canada and all Canadians, Prime Minister Stephen Harper acknowledged the intergenerational damage that the policies of residential schools caused to former students, their families, and communities. He offered an apology and asked for forgiveness from Indigenous peoples for failing them so profoundly. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission spent six years travelling across Canada and heard from more than 6,000 witnesses, most of whom were former students in the residential schools. Activities took the form of public sharing circles as well as community hearings. Survivors and former staff of the residential schools met together. The Commission heard about heroic acts of resistance by children, and also heard from school administrators and church representatives.

The Commission held seven national events to gather documents and hear statements. These

events, which drew about 155,000 visits including 9,000 survivors, featured cultural performances, ceremonies, and educational programs drawing on Indigenous traditions and protocols. The Commission defined reconciliation as “an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships,”<sup>9</sup> one that includes apologies, individual and collective reparations, and concrete actions toward societal change. The University of Manitoba is now the home of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation where the truths of the residential schools experience will be kept for future generations.

The Commission's final report, issued in 2015, states that Indigenous people had suffered physical, biological, and cultural genocide. This included seizure of land, violation and termination of treaties, forced relocation, replacement of traditional government with powerless “band councils,” and outlawing of spiritual practices. The report issued 94 “Calls to Action”<sup>10</sup> in the areas of education, health, child welfare, criminal justice and sentencing reform, the protection from violence of women and girls, and support for language and culture. In Canada, Indigenous people account for 49% of girls and 35% of boys in detention.

The report stated, “Reconciliation is not an Aboriginal problem; it is a Canadian one. Virtually all aspects of Canadian society may need to be reconsidered.”<sup>11</sup> According to polling data, seven out of ten Canadians agreed with the Commission's characterization of residential schools as cultural genocide. Canadians also strongly supported a national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women, as well as adding Indigenous history to all Canadian school curriculums, including the history of residential schools. The premiers of all Canadian provinces pledged to act on the Commission's recommendations. On December 16, 2015, the Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, met with national Indigenous leaders and committed to meeting annually to sustain and advance progress on shared priorities.<sup>12</sup>

# Sharing of Ideas Between Australia and Canada

The interaction among Indigenous leaders from Canada and Australia has been productive for both sides. Australians have visited Canada, and Canadians have visited Australia to share experiences and ideas. For example,

- Phil Fontaine, national chief of Canada's First Nations, came to Australia with two colleagues and spoke at major events across the country. He had played a pivotal role in the negotiations between the Canadian government and First Nations, which included funding for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
- The conservative Australian government finally agreed to erect a national memorial in Canberra, the capital, after strong urging by the Canadian government, which gifted the granite platform.
- Maggie Hodgson, a Canadian survivor who founded a movement involving thousands of Indigenous people, Healing Our Spirits Worldwide, told Australians that in Canada they had first focused on justice and on getting people's claims through the courts. But they discovered that traumatized people were being destroyed by the confrontational court system. Hodgson said, "We realized everyone had to find a level of healing before they could cope with the court system."<sup>13</sup> They focused on their traditional ceremonies, and many people came to healing through a spiritual approach. As people became stronger in their spirits, they were then strong enough to deal with their compensation claims for the abuse they had experienced.
- Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's 2008 apology gave impetus to Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper's apology three months later.

Bond and Butler note that whereas Australia put A\$26 million into the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, Canada has invested C\$650 million in the Canadian Aboriginal Healing Foundation. In Canada, court judgments have

played a significant role in ascribing responsibility to governments and churches. A C\$40 billion agreement in 2022 to reform Canada's discriminatory child welfare system and to compensate Indigenous families and others who were harmed was rejected by the Human Rights Commission because it did not fulfill all the requirements of the Commission, including guaranteeing \$40,000 in compensation for each First Nations child. The Commission did not prevent Ottawa from allocating \$20 billion for the reform of the child welfare system. On January 21, 2023, officials announced that the federal government and 325 First Nations had agreed to settle a class-action lawsuit, seeking reparations for the loss of language and culture brought on by Indian residential schools, for \$2.8 billion. The agreement must be approved by a federal court before funds can be disbursed to recipients. Under the agreement, there will be an initial payment of \$200,000 to all First Nations, which will allow each of them to create a 10-year plan for how they want to revitalize their language and culture. Australia has given less than A\$1 billion to survivors. It's also important to note that in Canada's First Nations communities, many new enterprises have sprung up. In some cases, support comes from sources such as the Indigenous Community Business Fund. A study of 500 Indigenous communities found that they generated C\$2.3 billion, and that self-determination and self-governance have positive effects.<sup>14</sup>

However, according to Bond and Butler, while Canada has done much more than Australia through its legal and government institutions, it has nothing to compare with the massive involvement of non-Indigenous Australians in the healing movement.

*Based on what we've learned from the Australian and Canadian experiences, we believe that leadership from the government and from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is needed to enable meaningful reconciliation and cooperation to grow between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in both countries.*

# 3.

## Reparations

### Current Status of Reparations in the United States

In 1989, then U.S. Rep. John Conyers (D-MI) introduced H.R. 40, so designated in memory of the unfulfilled promise of 40 acres and a mule for freed enslaved people after the Civil War. The proposed bill provided for the establishment of a Commission to Study and Develop Reparations Proposals for African Americans. The Commission's charge would be to examine slavery and discrimination in the colonies and in the United States from 1619 to the present and recommend appropriate remedies.

This proposal has been introduced in every Congress since then. With the departure of Congressman Conyers, the mantle for introducing the bill has been taken up by U.S. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX). A companion effort in the U.S. Senate is led by Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ).

In 2021, 32 years after it was first introduced, H.R. 40 received a hearing before the House Judiciary Committee. On the one hand, the hearing represented encouraging progress, and it was a tribute to the perseverance of those members of

Congress and advocates outside of Congress who have supported such legislation for more than three decades. On the other hand, it is shameful that a proposal of such significance could not even get a committee hearing for 32 years. And despite the committee hearing, the legislation did not come up for a vote on the House floor during the last session of Congress. It seems highly unlikely that it will even get a committee hearing during the current session of Congress.

Recognizing the challenges of getting Congress to act, a coalition of human rights organizations last year asked President Biden to issue an executive order creating a commission to study the issue of reparations for slavery. Despite a statement by then White House press secretary Jen Psaki that the President "supports a study of reparations," to date no action has been taken.

The concept of reparations is not new in the United States. Over the past half-century, there have been several instances of reparations designed to atone for past sins. These include

- Reparations for the internment of Japanese Americans during WWII;
- Reparations for the closing of public schools in Prince Edward County, VA, from 1959 to 1964, a manifestation of Virginia's policy of "massive resistance" to the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision ruling that

laws mandating racially segregated schools were unconstitutional; and

- Reparations to unsuspecting black males who had participated in the Tuskegee medical experiment, or to their heirs, for pain and suffering the experiments caused.

## The Limitations of Reparations

While the intentions in each case may have been laudable and the recipients may have modestly benefited financially, the implementation of the above-mentioned reparations has not ended discrimination against people of Asian American descent. Such ongoing discrimination is reflected by, but certainly not limited to, the killing of Vincent Chin in the 1980s in Detroit, the murder in 2012 of seven Sikh worshippers in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, and the multiple acts of discrimination toward Asian Americans in the wake of the controversy over the origins of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Reparations have also done nothing to end the de-facto racial segregation and underfunding of schools in countless communities throughout the United States, including in Prince Edward County today.

And reparations have not ended the disparate treatment of African Americans and other people of color by the health care system, or meaningfully addressed our racial divisions and the structural racism embedded in our legal and economic systems.

Moreover, had reparations been implemented at the national level for the descendants of enslaved people, unaccompanied by a broader effort to heal from racism, reparations would not have saved the lives of George Floyd or Breonna Taylor or countless other victims of police violence. They would not have stopped the slaughter of Black people at Mother Emanuel Church in Charleston, SC, or at the Tops Grocery Store in Buffalo, NY. And they would not have stopped the massacre of Hispanic people at a Walmart in El Paso, TX, or the

brutal carnage of Jewish people at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA.

Reparations on a national scale, were they implemented today, would also have no ability to halt the blind attacks on the alleged teaching of critical race theory in our public schools or to end persistent employment discrimination, or to transform the disparate treatment of people of color by the law enforcement community, by the media, or by most other institutions in our society. They would not eliminate persistent redlining and predatory lending that fuel residential racial segregation and widen the wealth gap. And finally, they would not alter the way in which we violate with impunity treaties with Indigenous communities and ignore their sovereignty.

In fact, it seems likely that reparations, without an accompanying effort to achieve racial healing, even if it could make it through a recalcitrant Congress or be created by Executive Order, could widen racial divisions without achieving racial equity and justice in our society, and thereby, continue to weaken our democracy.

*Nevertheless, we do support H.R. 40 and the creation of the Commission to Study and Develop Reparations Proposals for African Americans. Ensuring that the scope of the Commission's work includes Indigenous people and both "repair" and "healing," will, we believe, strengthen support for reparations, and make it more likely that they will have a meaningful, long-term impact on narrowing the racial divide and creating a more egalitarian society.*

# The Problem of Reparations Without Healing

It seems likely that reparations pursued without a broader commitment to healing would widen our racial and political divisions. The ongoing controversy about the so-called teaching of critical race theory in public schools illustrates the price of public ignorance of our history of racist behavior and the legacy today of that history. It also reflects the politicization of news coverage and social media in the expanding culture wars.

Many of those who express horror and fear that their children are being “propagandized” about our country’s racist past may not be overtly racist. But they may be susceptible to this propaganda because of their own fears, driven by their experience of not learning the complete truth of our history when they were in public school themselves. And their horror and fear may, intentionally or unintentionally, consign their children to the same fate.

An additional factor is the resentment and sense of loss in a significant segment of the White population, particularly among those living in economically deprived regions, who feel forgotten, discounted, and disrespected. Such fear and resentment, which are exploited for political purposes and fuel our racial and social polarization, go a long way in explaining the opposition to reparations. Trying to force reparations down people’s throats will only exacerbate the situation and stiffen opposition to using federal funds for such purposes. And in the unlikely possibility that pressure from certain quarters leads to some form of reparations, it will only generate greater resistance and widen our divisions.

The prevailing view in much of the country is reflected in comments by then-Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) on June 19, 2019:

“I don’t think reparations for something that happened 150 years ago for whom none of us currently living are responsible is a good idea,” the Kentucky Republican told reporters in

response to a question about whether reparations should be paid or a public apology should be made by Congress or the President. “We’ve tried to deal with our original sin of slavery by fighting a civil war, by passing landmark civil rights legislation. We elected an African American president,” he concluded.<sup>15</sup>

In a very narrow sense, of course, Senator McConnell is correct. But what he failed to acknowledge, and probably even failed to understand, is the benefits that have been afforded to him simply because he is White. His argument and the arguments of many who oppose reparations turn on whether or not they themselves engaged in racist behavior. In that context, it’s too easy to become defensive and let yourself off the hook by proclaiming that you don’t discriminate. So long as this view prevails, reparations are unlikely ever to be implemented. In fact, even the discussion of reparations, absent a recognition of a history that demands accountability, will be viewed as promoting an undeserved giveaway at public expense and will deepen the racial and political divides in this country.

To reach a critical mass of people who will support reparations and who will lead a struggle for racial healing, we must, without blaming or shaming, raise public awareness of our history of injustice and the legacy of that history today. That legacy includes not only slavery, but also

- The ensuing Jim Crow system of racist laws that lasted until the 1960s and persists today in more subtle forms, not only in the South but throughout most of the country;
- Federal legislation of the 1930s and 1940s, such as the inauguration of Social Security and the GI Bill, as well as policies related to housing, all of which intentionally discriminated against African Americans and have played a significant role in the wealth gap that has tripled since 1984;

- The evisceration of key elements of the civil rights legislation of the 1960s;
- The Indian boarding schools that attempted to crush the Indigenous culture and has led to much of the poverty that persists in Indian Country; and
- The broken promises and the lands stolen from Indigenous people in a process that relegated them to reservations on the least desirable and least productive lands.

At the same time, we must acknowledge and account for the economic injustices that many

members of other population groups have confronted, the legacy of their struggles, and the effect of these struggles on the strength of our democracy.

Finally, reparations, even if they could be enacted and implemented, would, without trust-building and healing and without an accurate and complete knowledge of our past and present, risk absolving the dominant group of any further responsibility for providing the support and resources necessary for achieving the changes that would still be necessary to ensure equity and justice for all in the future.

## Non-Traditional Reparations: Greenwood Rising

Tulsa, Oklahoma, still grapples with the legacy of its defining disaster, the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, which destroyed the city’s Black community, the Greenwood District, known as “Black Wall Street” for its economic and entrepreneurial excellence. Remarkably, Greenwood rose from the ashes, peaking in the 1940s, but beginning in the 1960s urban renewal and the construction of freeways divided and isolated the community and led to a steep downward spiral. Today, Greenwood is resurgent yet again, writes Hannibal Johnson, author of *Black Wall Street 100: An American City Grapples With Its Historical Racial Trauma* (Eakin Press, 2020). The new Black Wall Street is

a collaborative community consisting of residential, commercial, artistic, educational, cultural, entertainment, and religious elements working together to reclaim part of the past glory of this special, and for some, sacred, place. Nonetheless, as a whole, Tulsa’s Black residents are less well-off than white Tulsans on virtually every indicator of social, political, and economic well-being.<sup>16</sup>

As well as being a prolific writer, Johnson is an attorney and consultant specializing in

diversity, equity, and inclusion issues, human relations, leadership, and nonprofit governance. He serves on the federal 400 Years of African-American History Commission. He chaired the Education Committee for the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Commission and served as local curator of its world-class history center, Greenwood Rising.

Johnson writes that the work of social justice involves three critical elements: (1) introspection – looking at oneself through clear, distortion-free lenses with a view toward honestly assessing one’s full self and, ultimately, taking corrective action; (2) engagement – plugging into the community in ways that ignite one’s passions and align with one’s values; and (3) advocacy – publicly promoting, catalyzing, and mobilizing people and resources around issues and causes one supports.

Johnson cites the Zarrow Families Foundation as an example. Around the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, the foundation launched a bold, multimillion-dollar initiative to empower historically underserved and underrepresented communities. The foundation directed all future grantmaking to positively impact communities of color through the Zarrow

Commemoration Fund (ZCF), whose grantmaking addresses sustainable, collaborative, solution-oriented initiatives focused on disparities rooted in White supremacy and systemic racism. An advisory board composed exclusively of persons of color makes funding decisions. The ZCF elevates communities of color by empowering leaders from those communities, providing funding, and entrusting them to deploy resources back into those communities. It awards between \$1 million and \$2.5 million in community-based grants annually to projects that primarily serve the needs of people of color in the Tulsa area.

The foundation reflected on its role in the movement for social justice (introspection), looked to

communities of color for insight and direction (engagement), and created the groundbreaking ZCF, which, by precept and example, publicly promotes the empowerment of communities of color (advocacy).

Johnson says, “We too often think of reparations as one-way transfers of dollars to individuals affected by, in this case, historical racial trauma. That is but one way of thinking. Strategic investments can simultaneously help repair damage (*i.e.*, reduce disparities) and heal communities (*i.e.*, promote racial reconciliation). ZCF demonstrates the power of ‘non-traditional’ reparations.”<sup>17</sup>



# 4.

## A Transformative Approach to Reparations

To truly eliminate racism and create meaningful and enduring equity, reparations must be accompanied by a process that builds trust and promotes healing across racial, ethnic, and economic lines.

The process must begin with telling the truth about our past and then purposefully pursuing actions that promote justice and facilitate healing from the wounds of our past. In this way will we transform our society into one in which we embrace our common humanity and learn to see ourselves in one another. This must include an examination of our own biases and an assessment of whether our behaviors truly reflect our values. Without such a comprehensive effort, it will be impossible to build the necessary support for meaningful reparations with key stakeholders at the community and national level and across political and cultural divides.

This approach should not be promoted only by the so-called “choir.” Actions at the national level in both Australia and Canada were fortified by essential public support from prominent conservative leaders. Here in the United States, we must build a coalition of respected leaders who represent both liberal and conservative traditions. This is a

moral challenge for the United States that is too important and too all-encompassing to be framed in purely political terms. And as illustrated by the broad, passionate, bi-partisan, and multiracial response to the killing of George Floyd, the potential for building such a coalition exists. So, how do we take advantage of this potential to mobilize a powerful grassroots coalition for change?

We have had the privilege and good fortune to have been involved in two processes that have proven effective in bringing people together across racial, ethnic, and even political lines and that can lay the foundation for an emerging set of principles that can guide our journey to Transformative Reparations. One process is Trustbuilding, the other is Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation (referred to as TRHT). Both processes, applied in communities across the country, could provide a solid foundation for Transformative Reparations that can, over time, truly accomplish “repair and healing.”

# Trustbuilding

Transformative reparations require “levels of political courage and trust-based collaboration that can only be achieved by individuals who have the vision, integrity, and persistence to draw out the best qualities in others and sustain deep, long-term efforts.”<sup>18</sup> Trust is the moral foundation for the functioning of democracy and an essential part of the social contract. As Kate Monkhouse writes, trust is like the ligaments in the body. “When a crisis occurs, it is fit to flex and respond – or snap if stretched. We end up with direct action or violent protest when patience runs out or trust has been abused.”<sup>19</sup> In communities traumatized by histories of discriminatory policies or racist violence and oppression, trust is often in short supply. As described below, experiences in Richmond, Virginia, reflect certain vital components in the process of trustbuilding.

**Walking the talk.** Howard Thurman once wrote: “The root of what I condemn in others is found at long last in the soil of my own back yard. What I seek to eradicate in society...I must first attack in my own heart and life. There is no substitute for this.”<sup>20</sup> Marc Gopin at George Mason University says, “What goes on *between* people cannot be separated from what goes on *within* people...if we want to fix our conflicts, or anyone else’s for that matter, we had better get started on ourselves.”<sup>21</sup>

Trustbuilders must “walk the talk.” Trust is formed primarily in relationships. If our lives are not aligned with values of integrity, it will be impossible to build the relationships necessary to heal our communities. In Richmond, people of different racial, ethnic, class and faith backgrounds were able to step out of their comfort zones, and to move beyond blame or political posturing. They had the courage to take a fearless self-inventory of their attitudes, biases, relationships, and priorities, and became open to new possibilities.

Inspired by the national nonprofit, Initiatives of Change, a network known as Hope in the Cities emerged organically in the early 1990s. Two well-known Black activists, Collie Burton and his

wife, Audrey, reached out to Howe Todd, a White senior city administrator whom they suspected of racism. An unexpected friendship based on honest dialogue developed. A few months later, the leader of a Black organization commented, “Whenever I went into a meeting with Howe Todd, I always felt the cards were stacked, that the decisions were already made. Now he really listens to what I have to say.”<sup>22</sup> This new relationship set the tone for many other connections across traditional divides. Such demonstrations of changed attitudes and relationships proved more effective than traditional advocacy.

**Healing historical wounds.** A second key step in building trust within and between communities is to acknowledge the wounds of the past and their legacy, overcome false narratives, and collaboratively shape new stories that bring people together. David Brooks writes, “If a country can’t tell narratives in which everybody finds an honorable place, then righteous rage will drive people toward tribal narratives that tear us apart.”<sup>23</sup> Pain that is not transformed is transferred, often generationally. It fuels anger and resentment as well as shame and guilt. The way memory is handled in society will always be an indicator of power relations.

In many faith traditions, reconciliation and healing involve confession and restitution to those who have been wronged. Rev. Sylvester Turner describes a three-step process of acknowledgment and apology, forgiveness, and accountability and commitment to work together on acts of repair.

In 1993, Richmonders of all backgrounds took part in the first “walk through history” in the city, which was once a major center of the domestic slave trade and capital of the Confederacy. Collaboration between Hope in the Cities, the Richmond city government, and the Richmond Hill ecumenical retreat center brought on board elected officials and business leaders, as well as university and faith leaders. People from 50 U.S. cities and 24 countries joined them in retracing the footsteps of enslaved Africans from the James

River to the downtown slave market, acknowledging sites that had previously been too painful or shameful to remember.<sup>24</sup>

According to Joseph Montville, the architect of Track II diplomacy<sup>25</sup>, “walk” is the operative word. What began in Richmond was

an honest conversation about the past where courageous men and women squarely faced their symbolic or genuine responsibility for past injustices...Such a walk establishes an agenda for healing. It reveals the record of past hurts and allows the conscience of large numbers of people to be activated in the most positive sense.<sup>26</sup>

Over these last three decades, thousands of Richmonders, as well as people from states across the U.S. and from other countries with histories of racism, have found healing and gained new perspectives by walking the trail. In 2007, Governor Tim Kaine, who as Richmond’s mayor had issued an apology for the city’s racist history, led the Virginia General Assembly in voting to express profound regret for the Commonwealth’s role in the slave trade and for the exploitation of Indigenous people.<sup>27</sup> Universities, museums, and libraries formed a consortium, called The Future of Richmond’s Past, to tell Richmond’s story honestly. Jewish Americans and African Americans, in particular, are learning about each other’s traumatic history through “collective healing journeys” and facilitated community conversations. Confederate statues have been removed, and in 2021 an Emancipation and Freedom Monument was erected. Democratic and Republican governors have pledged support for the development of a national slavery museum at the site of the city’s former slave market.

A careful, honest, and inclusive examination of history allows everyone to engage without guilt or blame and enables communities to create new shared narratives. Healing historical wounds and wounded memory may be a key to releasing creative energy for the restoration of broken relationships and the reform of unjust systems.

**Honest conversation.** The willingness to publicly acknowledge racist history sparked dialogues across Richmond that “touched nearly every aspect of civic culture and identity”<sup>28</sup>—a third step in the trust building process. Information and intellectual understanding alone do not change people’s opinions. Indeed, evidence shows that individuals and groups may become even more polarized when presented with facts that contradict their viewpoints, their sense of identity, or their chosen narrative which may be based on resentment, humiliation, or insecurity about the future. Dialogues aimed at building trust must extend genuine welcome to all participants and honor their dignity. True dialogue is a voyage of shared discovery. In planning such dialogue circles, we should ask: What conversation is not taking place? Who needs to be part of the conversation and how might we engage with them? Dialogues where participants can listen deeply to others and ask themselves hard questions are essential building blocks for developing trust.

Richmond developed dialogue curricula that aim to move participants from “*an exchange of information to an experience of transformation*” in individuals, in relationships and—if sustained—to change in society. As one of us (Rob Corcoran) put it in an earlier publication, trustbuilding dialogue

...moves us to action because it touches us at our deepest point of motivation. We relate to other people differently and choose different priorities in our lives. Our friendships, our interests and our worldview are all deeply affected...Insight, new relationships, and commitment to action: these are fruits of good dialogue. Such dialogues create space where people feel able to express their deepest emotions, listen carefully, and find the courage to shine a spotlight on their own responsibility for change instead of accusing others.<sup>29</sup>

**Building diverse multisector networks of trust.** The trustbuilding model for self-reflection, healing historical wounds, and engaging in honest dialogue with people of all backgrounds was taken

up in other cities as well. Valerie Lemmie, the city manager of Dayton, OH, initiated the work of the Dayton Dialogue on Race Relations by inviting the Richmond Hope in the Cities team to offer training to project leaders and facilitators. The initial steering committee comprised more than 60 prominent community leaders of diverse racial and social backgrounds. The dialogues engaged thousands of people. A grassroots coalition in Portland, OR, prompted state leaders to formally acknowledge Oregon’s racist history at a Day of Acknowledgement event held at the state capitol on April 22, 1999. The coalition known as Oregon Uniting led dialogues and worked alongside teachers and school administrators, and staff from the Oregon Historical Society and the Multicultural Resource Center to develop *Beyond the Oregon Trail: Oregon’s Untold History* as a textbook for eighth graders. Hope in the Cities also trained community facilitators in Camden, NJ; Baltimore, MD; Hartford, CT; Selma, AL; and Norfolk, VA.

However, the challenges experienced by these initiatives also demonstrated that healing takes time and demands sustained efforts based on honesty, shared vision, and a commitment to long-term relationships. Building teams is the most essential, but often the most neglected, part of any social change movement. Many promising projects fail because of internal disputes or

personality conflicts. Too often, groups that may be working towards similar goals don’t talk with each other or share data. And nonprofits compete for the same funds.

Central to the ongoing work in Richmond is the focus on building authentic and selfless partnerships. This sometimes means being willing to be “silent partners” for one another’s efforts without need for recognition. Organizations share information and connections, meeting space, and staff time for public events. The Richmond Hill ecumenical retreat center connects faith institutions of all denominations and offers gathering space for people of all backgrounds and beliefs to engage in dialogue and healing activities related to the city’s racial history. Another partner, the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities, works with schools and businesses and convenes interfaith leaders in calls for justice.

The Community Trustbuilding Fellowship, a residential leadership formation program developed by Hope in the Cities, has brought people from 15 states to Richmond. They include community activists, business leaders, educators, representatives of health and human service agencies, police, and elected officials. The goal is to build diverse, multisector networks of trust capable of effective action for inclusive and equitable communities.



# Allaying Fear and Building Trust

There is a need for wider appreciation of how structural and implicit racism hurts the quality of life of all Americans. Author Heather McGhee illustrates in her recent book<sup>30</sup> how everyone suffers from our segregated lives and the withdrawal of shared community resources because of prejudice or fear of the “other.” As former U.S. Senator Bill Bradley noted, racial thinking obstructs Americans from reducing poverty because many in the White majority view Blacks as undeserving or unwilling to work. This hurts more Whites than Blacks because poor White people outnumber poor Blacks. We must demonstrate that transformative reparations benefit everyone in the long run.

Efforts to achieve racial healing and justice require the participation of all stakeholders. Activists must be able to build relationships with people of diverse opinions and to find allies in all sectors, including some whom they may regard as representing the problem (such as conservatives or corporate leaders). The late William Raspberry, a syndicated columnist with the *Washington Post*, once told a group in Richmond that “a focus on enemies diverts time and energy from the search for solutions.” A good question to ask, he said, is “If I defeat the enemy in the battle I have engaged, will my problem be nearer a solution? People respond more favorably to being approached as potential allies.”<sup>32</sup>

**The role of universities as allies.** “While Richmond’s resurgence brings great potential to deliver economic opportunities and neighborhood improvements to the city’s low-income communities, the pervasive sense is that many will remain cut off from opportunity by poverty and structural racism,” writes Ebony Walden, an urban planner and facilitator.<sup>33</sup> While the city became more open to new narratives about its history, “decades of identity reform operated to the contrary of economic realities.”<sup>34</sup> In fact, the rate of poverty among Black people has increased.

Universities can play a vital role in providing key data on structural inequities. In one potentially useful approach, Hope in the Cities collaborated with Dr. John Moeser, a professor of urban studies at the University of Richmond,<sup>35</sup> who was using census data to highlight the challenge of concentrated poverty in the region through the lens of race and political power. Numerous reports document the city’s racial inequities in health, income, education, housing and food access. Much of this is the direct consequence of decades of racially inspired public policies that continued well into the middle of the 20th century.

Hope in the Cities, in partnership with the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities and supported by the local community foundation, created a video and dialogue format based on Moeser’s work. Facilitators conducted presentations for community groups, business organizations, universities, and churches. This enabled large numbers of Richmonders to connect emotionally and cognitively with the data and historical narrative and to understand the continuing impact of racist policies on current social and economic structures. They saw how the heart of the flourishing black business community had been devastated by the extension of an interstate highway—built despite voters twice defeating the proposal in referendums. They saw the impact of redlining, and how most new employment locations were not served by bus lines.

Moeser’s work and the public campaign prompted Mayor Dwight C. Jones to launch the city’s first Anti-Poverty Commission (half its members were themselves members of underserved communities), and ultimately the city created an Office of Community Wealth Building. But as its first director, Thad Williamson, said, “It takes a lot of patience and good will and persistence. And the politics of shame will not get it done.”<sup>36</sup>

**Engaging the media.** The evolution of reporting on racial issues by the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* is a particularly striking example of Richmond's sustained effort to build a multisector network, which sometimes includes unlikely partners. The newspaper, along with its sister publication, the *Richmond News Leader*, was regarded by many in the city as public enemy number one because of its racist editorials in support of segregation and attacks on the first majority-black city council elected in 1977. In 1993 Hope in the Cities and its allies approached senior editors to share a new vision for Richmond as a leader in a national process of racial healing and to invite their support in communicating the importance of that vision. Editors and reporters took part in dialogues, community forums, and history walks. This supported efforts of those within the organization who were trying to bring about change. News coverage and editorials became more responsive to the community. On the 50th of the *Brown* decision, the newspaper acknowledged its past "seething advocacy" for segregated education, and lamented the "massive wrong" of the resistance. It went on to cohost public forums with Hope in the Cities and its partners, including an event with Edward Baptist, author of *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*.

When the Confederate flag was removed from South Carolina's State Capitol in July of 2015, an editorial in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* declared that it was finally time for a truth and reconciliation commission and that Virginia should take the lead. Isabel Wilkerson, author of *Caste* and *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*, wrote in the *New York Times*, "This is precisely what history demands and what this moment requires. Perhaps a new reconstruction could truly take hold and inspire the rest of the country if it sprang from the region that resisted it in the first place."<sup>37</sup> A *Times-Dispatch* editorial later that year stated that the case for reparations "appears stronger than dismissive critics think. Reconciliation depends on truth; truth requires intellectual courage. A dynamic Dominion need not fear examining the status of self-evident truths."<sup>38</sup> In 2022, Michael Paul Williams who joined the newspaper in 1982 as its first Black columnist, was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of the removal of Confederate statues from Monument Avenue.

Richmond's experience and the experiences of other communities seeking to address historic racial inequities and transform their communities helped to inform the creation of the Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation (TRHT) strategy in 2016, a product of the vision of Dr. Gail Christopher, then the vice president for strategy at the W. K. Kellogg Foundation.

# 5.

## Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation

The Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation (TRHT) process is built on a framework of five pillars—narrative change, racial healing and relationship-building, separation, the law, and the economy—that must be addressed to achieve true and lasting transformation. Each of the five pillars addresses a key question that must be answered in order to transform our society. The diagram below illustrates this framework:



**Narrative Change** – *How do we create a more complete and accurate narrative that will help people understand how racial hierarchy has been embedded in our society?*

**Racial Healing and Relationship Building** – *How can all of us heal from the wounds of the past and build mutually respectful relationships across racial and ethnic lines, relationships that honor and value each person’s humanity?*

**Separation** – *What are ways to address segregation, colonization, and concentrated poverty in neighborhoods?*

**The Law** – *What discriminatory civil and criminal public policies and practices must be changed and how should they be changed to produce a more just application of the law?*

**The Economy** – *What are the structural barriers to equitable economic opportunities and what are the solutions that will eliminate these barriers and create a more equitable society?*

Within each pillar the following structured five-step process can lead to healing and to structural change:

- Describe a vision for a future in which the myth of a hierarchy of human value has been jettisoned.
- Explore where we are now and how we got here.
- Analyze the key pressure points for achieving transformative change within each pillar.
- Identify the key stakeholders who must be engaged in the transformative process.
- Recommend actions to achieve this transformation, beginning with “low-hanging fruit” and building on early successes to tackle more difficult challenges

Beginning the process with a clear sense of our vision of a society without a racial hierarchy, rather than focusing on solving an immediate problem, enables us to see the big picture and to establish a well-defined direction for our journey to a new society. Once this direction is established, an analysis of how to address the other four issues follows logically.

The TRHT movement grew out of the America Healing movement launched by Dr. Christopher at the Kellogg Foundation in 2008. To support the America Healing movement, the foundation allocated \$75 million, its largest commitment ever, to engage local communities across the country in activities to promote racial justice, equity, and healing. Today, many of those activities continue, and the TRHT strategy, supported by both the Kellogg Foundation and local philanthropies, is at work in more than 14 local jurisdictions (see [healourcommunities.org](http://healourcommunities.org)), on more than 70 college campuses (see [aacu.org/trht-campus-centers](http://aacu.org/trht-campus-centers)), and in numerous national and local organizations. Under the banner of TRHT, people from all racial and ethnic backgrounds have been coming together to create new narratives based on hard truths, to build meaningful relationships across racial and ethnic lines, and to address both the structures that keep us separated and the legal and economic structures that yield racially disparate outcomes. They have been guided by the visions and recommendations of five TRHT Design Teams, each focused on at least one of the five pillars. Examples of their work follow.



# Kalamazoo, Michigan

In Kalamazoo, MI, where TRHT Kalamazoo has been at work since 2017, the community, in the words of TRHT leaders, is “...moving beyond good intentions, to being intentional not just about what we do as a community, but also how we do it.” The goal is “...to unearth and jettison the deeply embedded belief in a hierarchy of human value that sustains racism, to recognize the history and continued trauma resulting from that belief, and to create policy solutions that will sustain healing and structural change.”<sup>39</sup>

TRHT Kalamazoo has built a collaborative effort with three other cities in Michigan—Battle Creek, Flint, and Lansing—to build an infrastructure that can expand and sustain efforts to promote racial healing and racial equity. They have used an initial grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation as leverage to obtain five grants from local and national funders, including the Kalamazoo Community Foundation, as well as 189 individual gifts. These resources have enabled TRHT Kalamazoo to grow from 55 partners in 2018 to 646 partners in 2021, and they have built a network of more than 11 local organizations.

More than 87% of the organizations and 91% of individuals have reported positive changes as a result of TRHT participation, and 83% of individuals have reported that TRHT Kalamazoo has had a moderate or great impact on the Kalamazoo community<sup>40</sup>. Among the activities in which they are engaged are:<sup>41</sup>

- 1.** Hosting Expanding Our Horizons workshops for the Kalamazoo Valley Community College Police Academy, which connect law enforcement and community members through history and racial healing and help participants to build relationships and increased understanding between law enforcement and the community;
- 2.** Running workshops to teach people how to facilitate racial healing circles;
- 3.** Holding TRuTH Talks designed to enable people to tell their stories and to serve as catalysts for community action;
- 4.** Organizing art exhibits to help tell the story of Kalamazoo’s racial history;
- 5.** Producing a report that helped to drive the unanimous passage of the Housing Equity Ordinance of the Kalamazoo City Commission;
- 6.** Building strategies to engage the community in breaking down the separation that exists in local school systems; and
- 7.** Providing help to businesses in the region to facilitate growth in their understanding and practices to address both racial disparities and issues related to the asset-limited, income-constrained, employed individuals in their workforces.

## Buffalo, New York<sup>42</sup>

While Kalamazoo elected to try to address all five pillars, TRHT leaders in Buffalo, NY, elected to focus their attention on one pillar—economics—believing that, ultimately, the foundation of healing is ensuring economic equity and creating economic security for all of its residents. Within the context of building economic justice, they have built a multipronged approach, one that involves a range of activities designed to make systems more equitable.

The effort began with the launching of the Greater Buffalo Racial Equity Roundtable in 2016. Importantly, they recognized that, in their words, “Buffalo is the City of No Illusions.” In that context, they acknowledged that there are common values—good paying jobs, a desire for all children to have the “best opportunities to reach their full potential and find fulfilling careers that allow them to raise their families here as well,” a desire for healthy, vibrant and connected communities—that unite the entire community<sup>43</sup>. At the same time, they recognized the need to tackle the divisions and disparities that hold back the entire community.

## Alaska<sup>44</sup>

Starting in 2017, Alaska TRHT, a project of First Alaskans Institute, developed a relational platform for transformation, which included an extensive network of “accountability partners” or people with the power to transform systems. Accountability partners were asked to support efforts related to Indigenous language education; the transformation of public education; and the advancement of policies that center Alaska Native stewardship and protect Alaska Native ways of being. In addition, First Alaskans Institute trained media outlets on racial equity and invited them to be accountability partners.

Since then, the effort has evolved into a multi-pronged series of programs with diverse leadership. The programs are designed to create the conditions for systemic change. This includes efforts to

1. Achieve an accurate, authentic and just narrative
2. Facilitate a shared language and a tool to apply a racial equity lens in organizational decision-making
3. Expand and deepen personal connections across racial groups
4. Strengthen inclusive workplace practices
5. Improve outcomes for reentering citizens
6. Increase academic achievement and job readiness, and develop youth leaders
7. Establish a more inclusive workforce pipeline
8. Reduce contact with and improve outcomes resulting from juvenile justice systems, and
9. Provide pathways to family-sustaining careers for youth 16-24.

As part of its efforts, First Alaskans Institute has produced a How We Heal Toolkit. The introduction to the toolkit states:

At First Alaskans Institute, we operate with the understanding that when Alaska Native peoples are grounded in our ancestral ways of knowing, we are healthier and more knowledgeable about effectively stewarding our lands, animals, and waters, and strengthening our cultures, languages, and peoples in perpetuity. In the Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation (TRHT) Alaska movement we are incorporating the knowledge and vision of our healers to foster healing and connectedness for thriving communities.<sup>45</sup>

## The TRHT Movement and Strategies More Broadly

Although those engaged in TRHT activities in Kalamazoo, Buffalo, and Alaska freely acknowledge that they have a long way to go, they believe they have made significant progress in raising public awareness about racial divisions, both past and present, in their communities, and in bringing together people from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds and from all sectors of their communities to address these concerns. And they are building an infrastructure that will enable this work to continue until they meet their goal of transforming their communities into ones that have, in the words of TRHT Kalamazoo, “unearth(ed) and jettison(ed) the deeply embedded belief in a hierarchy of human value...create(d) policy solutions that will sustain healing and structural change...”<sup>46</sup>

In communities like Richmond, Kalamazoo, Buffalo, and the Alaska Native community, where trust is being built through truth and meaningful interactions among diverse groups of people, meaningful discussions about reparations and how to implement them are far more likely to occur than in communities where history is suppressed and forgotten and meaningful interactions across racial and ethnic lines are the exception rather than the rule.

It should be noted that while the TRHT strategy has been informed by lessons learned from the more than 40 Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) that have existed around the world, from Australia to South Africa to Canada, the TRHT movement reflects the unique circumstances of the United States and grows out of the many local activities that seek to address centuries-old patterns of oppression against all communities of color. Thus, its intent is not only to examine the legacy of slavery, but also to explore oppressions and their legacies against Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and the constant flow of immigrants, both White and non-White. It seeks to educate all Americans about our history, the good and the bad, and the legacy of that history today and to establish and magnify a vision of a society transformed into one in which we learn to see ourselves in one another.

Furthermore, to achieve true healing, equity, and unity, the TRHT strategy leaves adversarial activities to the court system and to the pressures that public protests can bring to address the injustices in the system. The TRHT strategy focuses on raising public awareness of our history and its legacy, without blaming and shaming, and on creating a transformed atmosphere in which the criminal justice system and other institutions of our society are inspired to ensure that their policies and practices yield racially equitable results.

# 6.

## Principles for Achieving Transformative Reparations

### How We Heal

Atoning for the sins of the past and their legacies is hardly a new concept. Yet, what we've learned from the experiences of both Australia and Canada, and importantly from domestic efforts in Richmond, the former capital of the Confederacy, from Kalamazoo in middle America, from Buffalo in the industrial Northeast, and from the Alaska Native community, suggest that Transformative Reparations, the true and enduring change that most of us seek, requires both acknowledgement and compensation for past harms and deep healing from the wounds created by these harms. Attaining one without the other is more likely to widen divisions and unlikely to achieve enduring change. And while strong and committed national leadership is essential to achieving "repair and healing," true transformation must come community by community across the country. Domestically, we have seen this in communities as different as Richmond, Buffalo, Kalamazoo, and the Alaska Native community. In each of these communities, and in countless others, significant progress has

been made in achieving "repair and healing." The bottom line is that each community is different, and it must recognize its uniqueness, both its unique assets and its unique challenges.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that, ultimately, we must "heal" together as a nation. In our work and in the work of many of our colleagues across the globe, we have learned that there are nine common characteristics or "principles" that will make success more likely:

#### **1 There must be an accurate recounting of history, both local and national.**

As we have seen in places as distant as Australia and Canada and domestically in places like Richmond, a key step in building trust and facilitating "repair and healing" is to acknowledge the wounds of the past and their legacy, debunk false narratives, and collaboratively shape a true

history of our past, both locally and nationally. Conservative commentator William F. Buckley once said, “History is the polemics of the victor.” Consistent with Buckley’s comment, our history has been written largely by the dominant groups in society and in local communities to serve their particular interests. But not fully understanding where we’ve been precludes broad support for a common vision of our future and how to get there. Thus, a common prerequisite to an effective and enduring effort to achieve “repair and healing” must be a full and accurate knowledge of how racism has played a role in the evolution of the community and the society, and a recognition that with this new awareness, all of us today have the power to heal from the wounds of the past.

## **2 A clear and common vision of our future and clear, ambitious and achievable goals must be established and progress must be regularly assessed.**

For an effort at racial healing to be successful, we must have a clear vision of our destination, and it must be a vision to which everyone can contribute and in which everyone feels a sense of ownership. But having a vision is not sufficient. We must have a plan for achieving our vision. Clear, measurable, and ambitious but achievable short, medium, and long-term goals that take into account the unique circumstances in each community are essential. Short-term goals should focus on what people can, in figurative terms, get their arms around, given their own constraints in terms of the economic, social, and family challenges that most people face as they navigate their daily lives. Addressing such “low-hanging fruit” successfully can help to generate momentum for addressing the medium and long-term goals. As the process continues, we must recognize that healing from the legacy of our past will likely be a lengthy and often frustrating process. Thus, there must be a commitment to the long haul, the courage to “walk the talk,” and the willingness to both avoid blaming and shaming and to regularly assess progress and adapt to changing circumstances.

## **3 There must be a commitment to understanding the different cultures, experiences, and perspectives that coexist in a community.**

Especially as immigration and birth rates, among other things, are dramatically changing the demographics of the nation and of our communities, we must work at (a) including all the diverse populations of a community, (b) understanding the different cultures, experiences and perspectives that are a growing part of so many communities, and (c) seeking to build authentic and selfless partnerships across racial and ethnic lines that are rooted in our shared visions and values.

## **4 It starts with sharing our stories with deep honesty, listening deeply to the stories of others, and avoiding blaming and shaming.**

The process of healing and transformation starts with individual commitments to honestly examine our own behaviors, acknowledge where we have fallen short, and pursue changes where we have fallen short. In the long run, we must hold ourselves, our communities, and our institutions accountable in areas where change is needed. A key element of this process is to provide an opportunity for everyone, irrespective of their position in the power dynamics of the community, to feel acknowledged and to have the opportunity to tell their stories. Sharing the various emotions—anger, rage, pain, fear, frustration, etc.—that have animated their behavior is a key element in building trust and promoting healing. For, in truth, everyone we meet has a story we know nothing about, and these stories play a significant role in shaping their behavior. Once one tells his or her story in an atmosphere of respectful and responsive listening, listening to and empathizing with the stories of others becomes easier, and we can begin to recognize our common humanity and the reality that ultimately, we all share a common fate. In this context, true healing can begin.

## **5 There must be a commitment to restorative justice and to policies that can effectively foster systemic change.**

Some form of restorative justice, or reparations, is an essential element of repairing the fabric of society. Empty rhetoric without action to repair the consequences of past wrongs will not suffice. With a greater awareness of our past and its legacy and a greater appreciation for the stories of community residents from across the spectrum of the community, those in a position to act must be willing, even anxious, to be held accountable, to promote meaningful and systemic change in order to overcome the pain that often is associated with past wrongs, and to work to establish an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect going forward.

## **6 Key institutions must be engaged and must have a definable role, and grassroots organizations must be active in “keeping them honest.”**

Although the entire community need not be involved, the involvement and meaningful interaction of a broad cross-section of the community is essential in order to obtain the engagement and support of a critical mass of the public, to build mutual trust, and to effect meaningful and enduring change. This means engaging all of the key institutions—schools, colleges and universities, business and labor, the media, the faith community, elected officials, law enforcement officials, and others. Furthermore, there must be definable and significant roles for each institution and for the leaders of each institution so that they will have a sense of ownership of the process. Framing issues in a way in which everyone feels the impact can help to involve a greater number of people from a range of sectors. Special deference as active partners and collaborators should be accorded to legitimate

grassroots organizations, for they will most likely drive this process from the beginning, and because they will bring unique experiences, wisdom, and passion to the work.

## **7 There must be a thoughtful and comprehensive communications strategy designed to keep the entire community informed, even those who are not directly involved in the process.**

An open and transparent process is essential to give people confidence that they are getting an accurate picture and to build trust in the process. Even opponents can eventually be brought into the process if they see that the process is open and forgiving and that the participants are attempting to create a win-win situation. To accomplish this, the media—traditional media as well as social media—must be engaged. Major events like town hall meetings, smaller events like joint worship services, an aggressive media campaign, school programs that are integrated into the daily lives of the students, and blogs to give all residents a chance to express their views in an atmosphere of compassion are among the ways to keep the community informed, to make the media our allies, and to build support for public policies that will combat institutional practices that have racist ramifications.

## **8 Adequate resources are essential and, to a great extent, must come from the community.**

One of the most important characteristics of the Kellogg Foundation’s grants to the 14 TRHT communities is the requirement that communities must match the grant with local funds and must use a portion of the resources to start an endowment fund that will enable activities to continue after the initial grants expire. As we

know, this is a long journey (as the saying goes, Rome wasn't built in a day, and overcoming the consequences of five centuries of oppression will not happen in a few years) with many potholes along the way. Too often, the journey to a transformed society ends prematurely, because the resources necessary to continue truth and racial healing activities expire. Thus, a key element of the concept of transformative reparations must be to plan ahead in order to have the resources necessary to finish the journey. These resources must include financial resources from the private sector, as well as expertise available in, among other communities, the education and faith communities. Adherence to the previous seven principles will help facilitate the availability of sufficient resources.

## **9 There must be a broadly understood process for dealing with the tensions that inevitably will arise.**

This process need not be complicated, but it is necessary to build and maintain trust when tough decisions are required and to keep the process from being totally sidetracked by inevitable tensions that arise. These tensions can often arise as a result of trauma caused by racist experiences. Thus, the process of healing will also demand an awareness of the effects of generational trauma on individuals and groups, as well as ways to build resilience. Different communities will handle this in different ways, depending on their circumstances. But, here again, an understanding of our shared fate is critical, and in this context, an effective process can turn the tensions and trauma into “aha” moments of healing, in-depth learning, and significant progress, and they can strengthen trust among participants in the process.

# 7.

## Now Is the Time: Next Steps

In the context of these principles, we recommend the following next steps:

- 1.** To broaden support for reparations as a key step to a transformed society, we recommend incorporating the strategies of trustbuilding and TRHT into the charge of the Commission proposed in H.R. 40 and include Indigenous people in the effort.
- 2.** Because we believe that bipartisan public sector leadership is important, particularly at the community level, we recommend engaging elected officials at every level of government by reaching out to the national organizations that represent them—National Governors’ Association, National Council of State Legislatures, Council of State Governments, National Association of County Officials, National League of Cities, and U.S. Conference of Mayors.
- 3.** At the same time, we recommend engaging
  - Nonprofit organizations such as Everyday Democracy, Community Action Partnership, and the American Library Association, which have been facilitating community-based activities on issues of public concern for many years with diverse groups of people;
  - The Association of American Colleges and Universities, which currently sponsors TRHT Campus Centers on 71 university and college campuses, with an ultimate goal of having TRHT Campus Centers on 150 campuses across the country;
  - Coming to the Table, which has affiliates in at least a dozen states that bring groups together for truth telling, relationship building, healing, and efforts to address inequitable systems; and
  - Faith communities, such as the Episcopal Church and its ‘Sacred Ground’ series of film- and readings-based dialogues to examine chapters of America’s history of racism, which by last year had involved more than 20,000 people around the country.



4. Since it is unlikely that Congress will act on H.R. 40 in the foreseeable future, we recommend launching a major effort to encourage the Biden Administration to create by Executive Order a bipartisan, multisectoral, racially and ethnically diverse Commission to Study Reparations, Trustbuilding, Healing and Transformation and to recommend actions to implement a comprehensive strategy for achieving a society in which acknowledgement and atonement have broad public support as foundational in embracing our common humanity and learning to see ourselves in one another.
5. To raise public awareness and engage a critical mass of people, we recommend launching a major public education campaign focused on the importance of repair, healing, and transformation at both the national and community levels and on how such an effort will benefit every community and the entire society while, at the same time, asserting our moral authority as a nation.
6. Inasmuch as achieving such all-encompassing transformation will require significant resources, we recommend pursuing not only government resources, but private sector resources from corporate and philanthropic interests. This will help to create some distance from partisan political interests while building broader community support for the effort.

# 8.

## Conclusion

The journey to “repair and healing” will be long and arduous, but one that promises rich rewards—economic growth, political stability, tranquility and pride, and a sense of common humanity—as it approaches its destination. Two quotes will summarize our beliefs:

***“If you don’t ever walk through trouble, or confront a risk, or reach beyond your comfort zone, you will never meet the rest of yourself.”***

— Dr. Vincent Harding, professor of theology and a leader in the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>47</sup>

Think about that. There is an entire part of ourselves, that part that shows courage and strength in the face of challenges, that we may never know unless we are willing to risk action to stand up for our values, unless we are willing to step out of our comfort zones to embrace our common humanity.

And as we acknowledge and appreciate our power and march forward, we might take to heart the words of the late Illinois senator Paul Simon, who, 34 years ago, in withdrawing from the 1988 Democratic Party Presidential Primary Campaign, asserted:

***“Americans instinctively know that we are one nation, one family, and when anyone in that family hurts, all of us eventually hurt. There really is a yearning across this good land for leadership that appeals to the noble in us rather than to the greed in us.”<sup>48</sup>***

Today, we are at a critical point in our history. Political divisions are high, and fear and a lack of trust threaten the future of our democracy. So, we must ask: Was Senator Simon correct in asserting “that we are one nation, one family...?” We believe he was. And now is the time for all of us to rise to the challenge, reach beyond our comfort zones, and prove it. If not now, when? If not us, who?

# Biographical Sketches of Authors

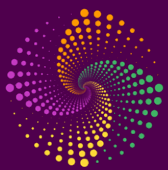
**Rob Corcoran** is a trainer, facilitator, writer, and racial healing practitioner. He has led trust-building workshops among diverse and polarized groups across North America, Europe, South Africa, Brazil, India, and Australia. Originally from Scotland, he served as the national director for Initiatives of Change (IofC) USA, which is part of a diverse global network that aims to inspire, equip and connect people to address world needs starting with changes in their own lives ([iofc.org/en](http://iofc.org/en)). He lived in Richmond, VA, for 40 years, where he founded the nationally and internationally recognized program for racial reconciliation Hope in the Cities. He collaborated on a dialogue guide for President Clinton's Initiative on Race. He served as consultant to the W. K. Kellogg Foundation's launch of a national Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation project. He advises the UNESCO-Guerrand Hermès Foundation for Peace Collective Healing project as part of its Healing the Wounds of Slavery program, as well as the National Collaboration for Health Equity's Culture of Health Leadership Institute for Racial Healing. Rob is currently the training design consultant to IofC International's Trustbuilding Program, which is active in 12 countries. Rob's book ***Trustbuilding: An Honest Conversation on Race, Reconciliation, and Responsibility*** (University of Virginia Press, 2010 and 2017) has been described as a "visionary, compelling account of healing and change." He and his wife, Susan, have three sons and four grandchildren. Since 2019, they have lived in Austin, Texas. His website is [robcorcoran.org](http://robcorcoran.org)

**Mike Wenger** is a senior fellow at the Association of American Colleges & Universities. For nearly 15 years he served as a senior consultant on race relations with the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, providing guidance on the foundation's America Healing and Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation (TRHT) efforts. During that same period, he taught sociology classes on racism and institutional racism at The George Washington University. He has made numerous presentations on TRHT and cofacilitated racial healing circles for such organizations as Independent Sector, the Association of American Colleges & Universities, the Community Action Partnership, the American Library Association, the University of Maryland School of Social Work, and George Mason University. He previously worked in several leadership positions at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, one of the nation's pre-eminent research and public policy analysis institutions focused on combating racism. From September 1997 to October 1998, he was deputy director for Outreach and Program Development for President Clinton's Initiative on Race. Before taking that position, he served in policy-making positions at the municipal and state levels in West Virginia and at the Appalachian Regional Commission in Washington, DC. His memoir, ***My Black Family, My White Privilege: A White Man's Journey Through the Nation's Racial Minefield***, was published in November 2012. Mike was born in New York City and educated at Queens College of the City University of New York, where he was a leader in the civil rights struggles of the early 1960s. In the late 1960s, he served as a community organizer and later as executive director for the Raleigh County (WV) Community Action Association. He now lives in Maryland, and has three grown children, four grandchildren, and a great grandchild.

*The opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect any official positions of AAC&U or its board of directors.*

# Endnotes

- 1 The Global Circle for Reparations and Healing is a group of US and African reparations leaders and organizations committed to building a global culture of Repair and Healing.
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- 41 This information comes from the TRHT Kalamazoo Impact Report—2017-2020 and from author interviews with two of the leaders of TRHT Kalamazoo, Stacey Randolph-Ledbetter and Emily Oliveras.
- 42 The following information related to TRHT activities in Buffalo comes from a publication entitled “Buffalo is building a new shared future, one with prosperity, equity, and opportunity, on every side of Main Street: The Racial Equity Dividend: Buffalo’s Great Opportunity.”
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- 47 This quote is taken from a speech made by Dr. Harding on February 20, 2004 at a symposium commemorating the 50th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. The commemoration was sponsored jointly by the Howard University School of Law, the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. and the NAACP.
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