

Community or Chaos? Dialogue as Twenty-First Century Activism

BEVERLY DANIEL TATUM, PH.D.*

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* Beverly Daniel Tatum, Ph.D. is President Emerita of Spelman College and the author of *WHY ARE ALL THE BLACK KIDS SITTING TOGETHER IN THE CAFETERIA? AND OTHER CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE* (20th ed. 2017).

I. INTRODUCTION

As we reflect on the fiftieth anniversary of the April 4, 1968 assassination of civil rights leader Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. we ask ourselves what has changed in American society since his death. Are we closer to Dr. King's vision of a just society in which all of its members can thrive regardless of race or class? Or, with American society in a state of growing political polarization and continued racial separation, are we farther away? If we don't like where we are, what can we do to change it? Social change requires action, but what is the action we need to reduce polarization and create a more just community? Can the practice of dialogue be an effective tool for social change? This Essay will explore these questions. Part II will focus on the current state of race in American society, Part III explores how dialogue can create empathy, which will allow for greater cross-racial communication, and Part IV briefly concludes.

II. FIFTY YEARS LATER: OUR CURRENT CONTEXT

Fifty years after the King assassination, we find American society in a state of increased polarization driven by divisive rhetoric from political leaders and "choose your side" cable news programming. Limited cross-group interaction leads to a fundamental empathy gap. The intentional manipulation of social media exacerbates racial tensions, including efforts by foreign agents to encourage the viral spread of false information.¹ An analysis of more than 3,500 Facebook ads purchased by the Russian-based Internet Research Agency during and after the 2016 presidential election revealed that more than half (55%) made express references to race with the intent of fomenting further racial discord.²

1. Nick Penzenstadler, Brad Heath & Jessica Guynn, *We Read Every One of the 3,517 Facebook Ads Bought by Russians. Here's What We Found*, USA TODAY (May 13, 2018, 5:58 PM), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/05/11/what-we-found-facebook-ads-russians-accused-election-meddling/602319002/>.

2. *Id.*

A. *Current Voting Patterns, Political Rhetoric, and Economic Disparity*

Though political divisiveness does not always fall along racial lines, voting patterns in the 2016 presidential election revealed a close alignment between race and political affiliation. Voters of color in general, Black voters in particular, overwhelmingly favored the Democratic candidate while the majority of White voters (across gender as well as socioeconomic categories) voted for Republican Donald Trump, successfully propelling him into the presidency of the United States.³ As a presidential candidate competing for the Republican nomination, Donald Trump stood out among his competitors through his use of derogatory stereotypes to characterize Latinx, African American, and Muslim communities.⁴ He advocated for building a wall along the U.S.-Mexican border, for the widespread deportation of undocumented U.S. residents, and for a ban on all Muslim immigrants.⁵ National news broadcasts widely captured such rhetoric, and neo-Nazi and White supremacist groups, sometimes referred to collectively as the “alt-right,” enthusiastically embraced it.⁶ In the months immediately following Trump’s election, there was a documented increase in hate crimes and racial harassment, including an August 2017 “Unite the Right” rally that drew neo-Nazis and avowed White supremacists to Charlottesville, Virginia, resulting in a clash with counter-protestors that turned deadly when one of the White su-

3. Alec Tyson & Shiva Maniam, *Behind Trump’s Victory: Divisions by Race, Gender, Education*, PEW RES. CTR.: FACT TANK (Nov. 9, 2016), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/behind-trumps-victory-divisions-by-race-gender-education/>.

4. Sarah McCammon, *Donald Trump Has Brought on Countless Controversies in an Unlikely Campaign*, NAT’L PUB. RADIO (Nov. 5, 2016, 6:00 AM), <https://www.npr.org/2016/11/05/500782887/donald-trumps-road-to-election-day>.

5. Ed Pilkington, *Donald Trump: Ban all Muslims Entering US*, GUARDIAN (Dec. 7, 2015, 7:27 PM), <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/dec/07/donald-trump-ban-all-muslims-entering-us-san-bernardino-shooting>.

6. Joseph Goldstein, *Alt-Right Gathering Exults in Trump Election with Nazi-Era Salute*, N.Y. TIMES (Nov. 20, 2016), <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/21/us/alt-right-salutes-donald-trump.html>.

premacists intentionally drove a car into the crowd of counter-protestors.⁷

Yet the national anxiety that many people feel is not just the result of a divisive election and its aftermath. The first two decades of the twenty-first century have been marked by the national trauma of the September 11th terrorist attack in 2001 and subsequent acts of domestic terrorism, as well as the financial collapse of 2008. The Great Recession, as it is now known, shook the ground of many, but it had a disproportionately disastrous effect for many Black and Latinx families.⁸ Many families of color lost their homes and also lost their jobs in the Great Recession. Disparate unemployment rates persist, despite the national economic recovery.⁹ The cumulative result is the largest racial wealth gap between Whites and people of color in the last twenty-five years.¹⁰ In particular, homeownership—a main driver of wealth accumulation—is an indicator of the growing economic disparities between Blacks and Whites. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, by the end of 2017, the homeownership rate for Whites was approximately 73% while the Black rate of homeownership was 42%, the largest gap in this measure of financial well-being since World War II.¹¹

7. Christopher Mathias, *Exclusive: New Report Offers Proof of US Hate Crime Rise in the Trump Era*, HUFFINGTON POST (Sept. 17, 2017, 7:45 PM), https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/hate-crime-rise-2016-united-states-trump_us_59becac8e4b086432b07fed8.

8. Barbara Ehrenreich & Dedrick Muhammed, *The Destruction of the Black Middle Class*, HUFFINGTON POST: THE BLOG, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/barbara-ehrenreich/the-destruction-of-the-bl_b_250828.html (last updated May 25, 2011).

9. Michael Hiltzik, *Black Unemployment Jumps, Depriving Trump of an Economic Talking Point He Never Deserved*, L.A. TIMES (Feb. 2, 2018, 11:10 AM), <http://www.latimes.com/business/hiltzik/la-fi-hiltzik-black-unemployment-20180202-story.html>.

10. Ehrenreich & Muhammed, *supra* note 8.

11. Erin Currier & Sheida Elmi, *The Racial Wealth Gap and Today's American Dream*, PEW CHARITABLE TR. (Feb. 16, 2018), <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2018/02/16/the-racial-wealth-gap-and-todays-american-dream>.

B. *The Aftermath of Progress*

Other societal changes of the last twenty years, in particular, include the post-civil rights era backlash against state-sponsored affirmative action programs and a dramatic rise in incarceration rates, particularly for Black men. Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow*, describes the social impact of this new reality:

More black men are imprisoned today than at any other moment in our nation's history. More are disenfranchised today than in 1870, the year the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified prohibiting laws that explicitly deny the right to vote on the basis of race. Young black men today may be just as likely to suffer discrimination in employment, housing, public benefits, and jury service as a black man in the Jim Crow era—discrimination that is perfectly legal, because it is based on one's criminal record.

This is the new normal, the new racial equilibrium.¹²

1. Do Black Lives Matter?

While the 2008 and 2012 elections of Barack Obama, the first Black man to serve as president of the United States, might be symbolic of racial progress, the series of lethal shootings of unarmed Black people by police officers that took place during his presidential tenure and since serve as a reminder that “justice for all” is not yet achieved. Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Walter Scott,¹³ John Crawford,¹⁴ Michelle Cusseaux, Yvette Smith,¹⁵ Alton Ster-

12. MICHELLE ALEXANDER, *THE NEW JIM CROW: MASS INCARCERATION IN THE AGE OF COLORBLINDNESS* 175–76 (2010).

13. Nicholas Quah & Laura E. Davis, *Here's a Timeline of Unarmed Black People Killed by Police Over Past Year*, BUZZFEED (May 1, 2015, 4:46 PM), https://www.buzzfeed.com/nicholasquah/heres-a-timeline-of-unarmed-black-men-killed-by-police-over?utm_term=.pp62LZ94Q#.fs0q25Ekx.

14. Joe Coscarelli, *No Charges Against Ohio Police in John Crawford III Walmart Shooting, Despite Damning Security Video*, N.Y. MAG.: DAILY INTELLIGENCER (Sept. 24, 2014), <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2014/09/no-charges-john-crawford-iii-walmart-shooting-video.html>.

ling,¹⁶ and Philando Castile are just a few of the names of unarmed Black people whose deaths at the hands of police were captured on cell phone video by civilian bystanders or by body cameras worn by the police officers.¹⁷ The repeated failure of the justice system to hold the killers accountable for these deaths gave momentum to the “Black Lives Matter” movement, protesting state-sponsored violence against Black people in demonstrations across the nation. Ferguson, Missouri, became a particular flashpoint as protestors were met with the militaristic use of police force to quell their demonstrations.¹⁸ Those critical of the protestors responded with the slogan, “All Lives Matter,”¹⁹ or in support of police officers, “Blue Lives Matter,” dismissing the shootings as defensible actions by frightened officers or as isolated incidents rather than evidence of systemic racism.²⁰ The polarization of viewpoints deepened when NFL player Colin Kaepernick “took a knee” during the National Anthem and other players, primarily African Americans, joined in solidarity and in silent protest of these police shootings; President Donald Trump escalated the conflict by publicly attacking the protesting players with offensive language and urging that all protesting players be fired.²¹

15. KIMBERLÉ WILLIAMS CRENSHAW & ANDREA J. RITCHIE, AFRICAN AM. POLICY FORUM, SAY HER NAME: RESISTING POLICE BRUTALITY AGAINST BLACK WOMEN 16, 23 (July 2015), http://static1.squarespace.com/static/53f20d90e4b0b80451158d8c/t/560c068ee4b0af26f72741df/1443628686535/AAPF_SMN_Brief_Full_singles-min.pdf.

16. Richard Fausset, Richard Pérez-Peña & Campbell Robertson, *Alton Sterling Shooting in Baton Rouge Prompts Justice Dept. Investigation*, N.Y. TIMES (July 6, 2016), <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/06/us/alton-sterling-baton-rouge-shooting.html>.

17. Christina Capecchi & Mitch Smith, *Officer Who Shot Philando Castile is Charged with Manslaughter*, N.Y. TIMES (Nov. 16, 2016), <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/17/us/philando-castile-shooting-minnesota.html>.

18. KEEANGA-YAMAHTTA TAYLOR, FROM #BLACKLIVESMATTER TO BLACK LIBERATION 156 (2016).

19. Daniel Victor, *Why ‘All Lives Matter’ Is Such a Perilous Phrase*, N.Y. TIMES (July 15, 2016), <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/16/us/all-lives-matter-black-lives-matter.html>.

20. Jelani Cobb, *Honoring the Police and Their Victims*, NEW YORKER (July 25, 2016), <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/07/25/baton-rouge-st-paul-and-dallas>.

21. Matthew Futterman & Victor Mather, *Trump Supports N.F.L.’s New National Anthem Policy*, N.Y. TIMES (May 23, 2018),

2. Changes in the American Demographic

The demographic changes of the last fifty years serve as the backdrop for the current political climate. In the 1950s when the civil rights era first launched, the U.S. population was nearly 90% White.²² Today, the school-age population is more than 50% children of color.²³ Latinxs have become the largest population of color, approximately 18% of the total U.S. population; African Americans now account for 13%.²⁴ Currently near 6%,²⁵ Asian Americans are now the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population.²⁶ In 1970, only 1% of babies were multiracial.²⁷ By 2013, 10% of U.S. babies were categorized as multiracial.²⁸ In his 2016 book, provocatively titled *Brown is the New White: How the Demographic Revolution Has Created a New American Majority*, author Steve Phillips highlights the speed with which the U.S. population is shifting.²⁹ He writes, “[e]ach day, the size of the U.S. population increases by more than 8,000 people,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/23/sports/nfl-anthem-kneeling.html> (“[A]t a rally . . . in Alabama in September, Mr. Trump . . . rous[ed] the crowd by imploring N.F.L. owners to fire any player who refused to stand”); see also Nick Wagoner, *Colin Kaepernick Continues Anthem Protest; Other 49ers, Rams Join*, ESPN (Sept. 13, 2016), http://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/17534211/colin-kaepernick-san-francisco-49ers-again-kneels-national-anthem.

22. U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, A LOOK AT THE 1940 CENSUS 9 (2012), https://www.census.gov/newsroom/cspan/1940census/CSPAN_1940slides.pdf.

23. Marta Tienda, *Diversity as a Strategic Advantage: A Sociodemographic Perspective*, in OUR COMPELLING INTERESTS: THE VALUE OF DIVERSITY FOR DEMOCRACY AND A PROSPEROUS SOCIETY 192, 204 (Earl Lewis & Nancy Cantor eds., 2016).

24. *Quick Facts*, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045217> (last visited Sept. 30, 2018).

25. *Id.*

26. Gustavo López, Neil G. Ruiz & Eileen Patten, *Key Facts About Asian Americans, a Diverse and Growing Population*, PEW RES. CTR. (Sept. 8, 2017), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/08/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>.

27. *Multiracial in America: Proud, Diverse and Growing in Numbers*, PEW RES. CTR. (June 11, 2015), <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/06/11/multiracial-in-america/>.

28. *Id.*

29. See STEVE PHILLIPS, *BROWN IS THE NEW WHITE: HOW THE DEMOGRAPHIC REVOLUTION HAS CREATED A NEW AMERICAN MAJORITY* 3 (2016).

and nearly 90 percent of that growth consists of people of color,” which is the result of differential birth and death rates and patterns of immigration.³⁰

This rapid shift in population percentages fuels some Whites’ fear of being outnumbered by those they have historically been taught to view with suspicion. As the population of color increases, the deeply held idea of America as a White nation built on the assumption of White supremacy is challenged, requiring a significant paradigm shift for many. Even the election of Barack Obama frightened some people as it challenged the notion of White political control. His victory was only made possible because of cross-racial coalitions and high voter turnout within communities of color.³¹

3. Current School Segregation

Despite the rapid diversification of the U.S population, old patterns of segregation persist, most notably in schools and neighborhoods. Though it has been more than sixty years since the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision,³² American public schools are more segregated today than they were in 1980, as measured by the percentage of Black students attending schools that are “90-100% non-White.”³³ Nationwide, nearly 75% of Black students today attend schools where students of color are in the majority and 38% attend schools with student bodies that are 10% or less White.³⁴ Similarly, approximately 80% of Latinx students attend schools where students of color are in the majority and more than 40% attend schools where the White population is less than 10% of the student body.³⁵ Both Black and Latinx students are much more

30. *Id.* at 5.

31. *Id.* at 3–4.

32. *Brown v. Bd. of Educ.*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

33. Carl Kaestle, *Federalism and Inequality in Education: What Can History Tell Us?*, in *THE DYNAMICS OF OPPORTUNITY IN AMERICA: EVIDENCE AND PERSPECTIVES* 35, 48 (Irwin Kirsch & Henry Braun eds., 2016).

34. Thomas J. Sugrue, *Less Separate, Still Unequal: Diversity and Equality in “Post-Civil Rights” America*, in *OUR COMPELLING INTERESTS: THE VALUE OF DIVERSITY FOR DEMOCRACY AND A PROSPEROUS SOCIETY*, *supra* note 23, at 39, 55–56.

35. *Id.* at 57.

likely than White students to attend a school where 60% or more of their classmates are living in poverty, as measured by the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch programs.³⁶ Separate remains unequal as schools with concentrated poverty and racial segregation are still likely to have less-experienced teachers, high levels of teacher turnover, inadequate facilities, and fewer classroom resources.³⁷

Key Supreme Court decisions between 1974 and 2007 dramatically reduced the number of implementation methods available to communities engaged in school desegregation by eliminating strategies such as cross-district busing,³⁸ dismantling local court supervision of desegregation plans,³⁹ and limiting the use of race-based admissions to ensure diversity in magnet school programs.⁴⁰ As these options for desegregation have been curtailed by court rulings, the number of intensely segregated schools with zero to 10% White enrollment has more than tripled.⁴¹ Once again, students are typically

36. *Id.* at 55–57.

37. *Id.* at 52–53.

38. *Milliken v. Bradley*, 418 U.S. 717, 746–53 (1974). In this case, the Court prohibited court-ordered busing across district lines unless there was proof that the actions of the school districts had created the racial disparities between them. *Id.* Suburban Detroit school districts, which had a majority-White student population, could not be forced to participate in the desegregation of inner-city Detroit schools, which were majority-Black. *Id.*

39. *Bd. of Educ. of Okla. City v. Dowell*, 498 U.S. 237, 247–50 (1991). This case established the precedent that once a school district had demonstrated that it was a unitary school district (rather than a dual, segregated one), it could be released from judicial oversight. *Id.* at 249–50. Without judicial oversight, Oklahoma City reinstated neighborhood-based school assignments that, because of residential segregation, resulted in school re-segregation. *Id.* at 240–43. The case had the ripple effect of federal judges releasing other school districts from their court-ordered desegregation plans. See generally GARY ORFIELD, SUSAN E. EATON & THE HARVARD PROJECT ON SCHOOL DESEGREGATION, *DISMANTLING DESEGREGATION: THE QUIET REVERSAL OF BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION* (1996).

40. *Parents Involved in Cmty. Sch. v. Seattle Sch. Dist. No. 1*, 551 U.S. 701, 747–48 (2007). The Court found the Seattle School District’s consideration of race in school assignments, though intended to achieve racial balance, was unconstitutional under the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. *Id.* at 725–29, 747–48.

41. GARY ORFIELD ET AL., CIVIL RIGHTS PROJECT, *BROWN AT 62: SCHOOL SEGREGATION BY RACE, POVERTY AND STATE* 1, 3 (2016),

assigned to schools based on where they live; to the extent that neighborhoods are segregated, the schools remain so.⁴² Consequently, young people growing up in racially divided communities are almost as separated from each other's daily lives as they were fifty years ago.

4. Current Context Through the Words of Dr. King

What would Dr. King have to say to us today about the current state of the nation? How would he understand the return to segregated schools in communities that had once desegregated, the backlash against affirmative action, the rising rates of Black incarceration, the growing economic disparities, and the increased mainstream visibility of White supremacists on the political landscape? We can find an answer in his last book, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*⁴³ Published in 1968, Dr. King offered commentary that seems quite relevant to our current context, even though it is fifty years later. He wrote:

[W]ith each modest advance the white population promptly raises the argument that the Negro has come far enough. Each step forward accents an ever-present tendency to backlash.

. . . .

. . . [T]he line of progress is never straight. . . .

We are encountering just such an experience today. The inevitable counterrevolution that succeeds every period of progress is taking place.⁴⁴

This tendency of the nation to take one step forward on the question of racial justice and then to take a step backward is still the pattern.⁴⁵

<https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/brown-at-62-school-segregation-by-race-poverty-and-state>.

42. Sugrue, *supra* note 34, at 53–55.

43. See generally MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., *WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE: CHAOS OR COMMUNITY?* (Beacon Press 2010) (1968).

44. *Id.* at 11–13.

45. See *supra* notes 38–40 and accompanying text.

If we recognize and acknowledge the backward motion in our current context, we might appropriately ask: What will it take to move forward as a society, again advancing the cause of racial justice and equity?

Again, Dr. King's 1968 observations offer important insights:

A vigorous enforcement of civil rights will bring an end to segregated public facilities, but it cannot bring an end to fears, prejudice, pride and irrationality, which are the barriers to a truly integrated society. . . .

In the final analysis the white man cannot ignore the Negro's problem, because he is a part of the Negro and the Negro is a part of him. The Negro's agony diminishes the white man, and the Negro's salvation enlarges the white man.

What is needed today on the part of white America is a committed altruism which recognizes this truth. True altruism is more than the capacity to pity; it is the capacity to empathize. Pity is feeling sorry for someone; empathy is feeling sorry with someone. Empathy is fellow feeling for the person in need—his pain, agony and burdens. I doubt if the problems of our teeming ghettos will have a great chance to be solved until the white majority, through genuine empathy, comes to feel the ache and anguish of the Negroes' daily life.⁴⁶

III. MOVING FORWARD: DIALOGUE AS TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY ACTIVISM

How might such empathy be created, particularly in a time when the opportunities for meaningful cross-racial interaction are few and far between? I would argue empathy can be achieved through the power of structured dialogue. In 1968, King observed, "racial understanding is not something that we find but something that we must create . . . the ability of [racial groups] to work together, to understand each other, will not be found ready-made; it must be created by the

46. KING, *supra* note 43, at 106–07.

fact of contact.”⁴⁷ *Empathic* contact must be created. It is just not enough to be in the same neighborhood or even in the same room. We have to create contact that allows for genuine empathy across lines of difference.

A. *Creating Empathy Through Cross-Racial Dialogue*

In the face of continued racial separation and increased segregation, there are three things we should do to help the moral arc of the universe bend toward justice again. First, we must continue to expose the past and present manifestations of institutional racism, facing the truth of our history. We cannot run from the past and hide from the way that our collective history, as represented by the racially discriminatory policies and practices of the past, continues to shape the present. Second, we must create opportunities to tell our own stories in environments where there is a commitment to *listen*, a prerequisite for the development of empathy that will lead to constructive action. While some people act against injustice because it is right to do so, most people take action because injustice impacts someone they care about. To mobilize more champions of social justice, we have to expand that circle of care. Then, we must take action together; Whites and people of color committed to social change. Dialogue is a uniquely powerful tool to achieve all three goals.

1. Lessons From the Past

During the civil rights era, mass action, such as organized protest marches with thousands of people participating, was an effective tool of social protest.⁴⁸ We have seen a contemporary example of that in March for Our Lives, organized by teenage survivors of the Parkland school shooting that took place in Florida in the winter of 2018.⁴⁹ Protesting gun violence in schools and advocating for responsible gun control policies, the young marchers (the majority of whom were White) mobilized hundreds of thousands of people who threatened to

47. *Id.* at 28.

48. *Id.* at 25–28.

49. Audra D.S. Burch & Patricia Mazzei, *Death Toll Is at 17 and Could Rise in Florida School Shooting*, N.Y. TIMES (Feb. 14, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/14/us/parkland-school-shooting.html>.

use the power of their vote to bring about change.⁵⁰ Through their action, they gained the attention of legislators and policy makers, lauded by many who saw their speeches on television and identified them as someone they cared about—“that could be my daughter, that could be my son,”—and empathized with their grief and pain as they publicly mourned their fallen classmates.⁵¹

But when the person doesn't look like you or someone you care about the response is different. For example, when Black teenagers and others marched to protest the police shootings of unarmed Black people, some victims just teenagers themselves, the response was not an empathic one; rather it was a militarized one. These protestors were viewed as troublemakers, even labeled sometimes as terrorists.⁵² When someone is viewed as “other,” empathy is less likely. In order to bring about genuine change, we need genuine empathy. Chaos or community? Our only healthy choice is to build a bigger tent—a larger circle of care, a more inclusive sense of community. Focused dialogue is the tool of choice for that community building.

It is what the abolitionists did in the nineteenth century to move their freedom agenda forward against tremendous opposition. Their example was highlighted for me in an essay I read shortly after the 2016 presidential election. The author, Linda Hirshman, drew parallels between the political struggles of 1850 and the challenge of a divided nation today. She wrote:

In 1850, like the Democrats and their allies in 2016, the abolitionists took a terrible hit. They had worked for 20 years to bring down the worst institution in American history, chattel slavery. And they thought they might have been on the verge of a breakthrough,

50. Tim Chaffee, *March for Our Lives Highlights: Students Protesting Guns Say 'Enough is Enough,'* N.Y. TIMES (Mar. 24, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/24/us/march-for-our-lives.html>.

51. Julie Turkewitz & Anemona Hartocollis, *Highlights: Students Call for Action Across Nation; Florida Lawmakers Fail to Take Up Assault Rifle Bill,* N.Y. TIMES (Feb. 20, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/20/us/gun-control-florida-shooting.html>.

52. Dahleen Glanton, *As Country Listens to Florida Teens, Black Lives Matter Youths Feel Ignored,* CHI. TRIBUNE (Feb. 26, 2018, 5:00 AM), <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/columnists/glanton/ct-met-florida-teens-black-lives-matter-dahleen-glanton-20180223-story.html>.

with a proposal to ban slavery in all the territories taken in the Mexican War. But in the Compromise of 1850, Congress basically handed those territories to the pro-slavery forces, and, with an updated Fugitive Slave Act, it conscripted every Northern citizen into an army of slave catchers, obliged to aid in sending black people back to the slaveholding South.

....

... [A]fter the 1850 defeat, when the normal channels of politics looked so hopeless[, the abolitionists organized]. . . . They elected executive committees to run their affairs, dispatched speakers to spread the word and held annual conventions. . . . They held fairs to raise money and sell goods made without slave labor. Then they started going door to door with petitions. The pro-slavery Congress forbade them from delivering those petitions, but that didn't matter. Each time a woman approached a neighbor about signing, she got a chance to publicize slavery's cruelty.⁵³

In other words, each time a woman approached a neighbor she got a chance to create a sense of empathy in her neighbors for those who were enslaved. The direct engagement of neighbors and friends through the spread of personal narratives was key to their success. In the same way, we must create the space for the sharing of personal narratives to break down walls and reunite America, creating a shared vision of true democracy not yet realized. These lessons from the past can help guide us in the future.

53. Linda Hirshman, *To Resist a Trump Presidency, Ask: What Would the Abolitionists Do?*, WASH. POST (Nov. 18, 2016), https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/to-resist-a-trump-presidency-ask-what-would-the-abolitionists-do/2016/11/18/2615a136-a767-11e6-8fc0-7be8f848c492_story.html?utm_term=.bcc764babdb5.

2. Understanding Different Perspectives as a Tool for Generating Empathy

Social scientists know that those at the bottom of any hierarchy usually know more about those at the top than those at the top know about those at the bottom.⁵⁴ It is easy to understand why. Consider that the maid who cleans her employer's house will know a lot more about the employer's life than the employer knows about the maid's. The maid sees the inside of that house and every room in it. But it is *entirely possible* that the employer has never been to the maid's house or visited her neighborhood and may not know much about the maid's life away from her job. When we don't know the stories of those at the bottom of the hierarchy our knowledge is incomplete, not just because we don't know the stories of those at the bottom. It is incomplete because if we don't know the stories at the bottom, we can't *truly* know the stories of those at the top, *because the stories are linked*. We have to fill in those knowledge gaps because if we don't know those stories, we don't understand what those affected are talking about. And without that knowledge, you cannot have empathy. And without empathy, you are not likely to take constructive action. The development of *empathy* requires listening to each other's life stories. But some stories are hard to hear.

Consider the controversy sparked in 2016 by former NFL player Colin Kaepernick's decision not to stand for the National Anthem as a silent protest of racism within the criminal justice system. His actions were applauded by some and criticized by others. Some people refused to hear his clear explanation of why he chose to kneel and labeled his acts "unpatriotic" and disrespectful to veterans who sacrificed to defend the flag.⁵⁵ Sports writer Tom Ziller captured two divergent perspectives—that of Colin Kaepernick and that of another football player, Drew Brees, the quarterback of the New Orleans Saints, who criticized Kaepernick for his silent protest. Ziller writes:

54. Susan T. Fiske, *Controlling Other People: The Impact of Power on Stereotyping*, 48 AM. PSYCHOLOGIST 621, 624–26 (1993).

55. Amy Tennery, *Most Americans Disagree with Kaepernick, but Respect His Right to Protest*, REUTERS (Sept. 14, 2016), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nfl-anthem-poll-idUSKCN11K2ID>.

Brees hears the anthem and sees his World War II veteran grandfather and the dozens of soldiers he's met through his involvement with the USO. Kaepernick hears the anthem and sees Philando Castile, Walter Scott, Freddie Gray, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner [unarmed Black men killed by police]. These are not mutually exclusive visions. America can be worthy of pride and worthy of disgust. Even World War II provided lessons to this effect: while American soldiers liberated Europe, 120,000 Americans of Japanese descent were rounded up and incarcerated by our government. America can be worthy of pride and worthy of disgust. The examples, from our slave-owning Founding Fathers to the century of Jim Crow laws that followed emancipation, are endless.⁵⁶

As Ziller points out, both men's perspectives have meaning, but I would argue that the first perspective is based on an incomplete history, even of veterans and their World War II experience. White veterans and veterans of color were not treated the same. After World War II, veterans received several major benefits under the GI Bill that provided funding for education, job training, and home loan guarantees, which were major factors in the growth of the middle class in America in the 1950s.⁵⁷ Yet during the same period, thousands of Black veterans in both the North and South were denied housing and business loans, as well as admission to Whites-only colleges and universities.⁵⁸ To note the magnitude of discrimination, consider that of the 67,000 mortgages insured by the GI Bill in New York and Northern New Jersey, less than 100 of them went to support home purchases by veterans of color.⁵⁹ As noted earlier, the differentials in home ownership created then still have significance for the financial well-

56. Tom Ziller, *Colin Kaepernick's Protest Makes People Like Drew Brees Uncomfortable. That's the Point*, SBNATION (Aug. 30, 2016, 10:13 AM), <https://www.sbnation.com/2016/8/30/12708298/colin-kaepernick-protest-drew-brees-reaction>.

57. IRA KATZNELSON, *WHEN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION WAS WHITE* 113 (2005).

58. *See generally id.* at 113–41 (discussing the realities of the GI Bill for Black veterans).

59. JIM WALLIS, *AMERICA'S ORIGINAL SIN: RACISM, WHITE PRIVILEGE, AND THE BRIDGE TO A NEW AMERICA* 89 (2016) (internal citations omitted).

being (or lack thereof) of families today. When we do not acknowledge this aspect of our history, we fail to acknowledge the pain that was and is *still* being felt by those most affected.

Similarly, people with different life experiences hear different meanings when protestors chant the phrase “Black Lives Matter”—a rallying cry that began as a hashtag on Facebook and spread across Twitter in response to the police shootings of unarmed Black men and women.⁶⁰ Recently, an elderly White gentleman told me why he objected to the phrase. Simply put, he felt excluded by it. When he heard the phrase “Black Lives Matter,” he heard it as “*only* Black Lives Matter” rather than “Black Lives Matter, *too*.”

To me, an African American woman, it is obvious that the phrase highlights the ways that Black lives have been devalued historically and currently, and not just because police officers killed unarmed Black men and women without accountability. Consider as well that the health of Black citizens (both children and adults) can be disregarded when water known to be contaminated with lead flowed from their faucets for months without action taken⁶¹ and that predatory lenders can get away with offering subprime loans to Black and Latinx borrowers while White borrowers with comparable credit scores are offered more conventional, less risky loans.⁶² Such discriminatory behavior can happen for months, in some cases years, without public outcry because those lives, it seems, are considered less valuable. *But if you don't know those stories*, you don't understand what those affected are talking about. And without that knowledge, you can't have empathy.

Consider also the example of Georgetown University, the prestigious Washington, D.C. Catholic and Jesuit institution founded in

60. Collier Meyerson, *The Founders of Black Lives Matter: “We Gave Tongue to Something that We All Knew Was Happening,”* GLAMOUR (Nov. 1, 2016, 8:15 AM), <https://www.glamour.com/story/women-of-the-year-black-lives-matter-founders>.

61. Merrit Kennedy, *Lead-Laced Water in Flint: A Step-By-Step Look at the Makings of a Crisis*, NAT'L PUB. RADIO (Apr. 20, 2016, 6:39 PM), <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/04/20/465545378/lead-laced-water-in-flint-a-step-by-step-look-at-the-makings-of-a-crisis>.

62. Jacob S. Rugh & Douglas S. Massey, *Racial Segregation and the American Foreclosure Crisis*, 75 AM. SOC. REV. 629, 632 (2010).

1789.⁶³ In a very tangible way, those at the bottom of the hierarchy made it possible for those at the top to be educated at Georgetown. In 1838, facing financial ruin, the priests in charge of Georgetown paid the school's debts by selling 272 of the enslaved Africans under their control, netting \$115,000—what would be \$3.3 million in today's dollars.⁶⁴ Journalist Rachel Swarns begins her article about the sale of enslaved Africans with this arresting description:

The human cargo was loaded on ships at a bustling wharf in the nation's capital, destined for the plantations of the Deep South. Some slaves pleaded for rosaries as they were rounded up, praying for deliverance.

But on this day, in the fall of 1838, no one was spared: not the 2-month-old baby and her mother, not the field hands, not the shoemaker and not Cornelius Hawkins, who was about 13 years old when he was forced onboard.⁶⁵

As this painful history has been uncovered and carefully documented, dialogue between students, faculty, and descendants of the enslaved people is needed to make recommendations on how best to acknowledge this painful history and reconcile this past with the present. This dialogue is needed not only for the institution but also for the descendants of those who were enslaved and sold and for the other institutions with similar but as yet untold stories.

3. Creating Community Dialogue

A commitment to this kind of dialogue is needed across the nation. Fortunately, there are community leaders making such commitments. One example comes from the work of the William Winter

63. *Jesuit & Catholic Identity*, GEORGETOWN U., <https://www.georgetown.edu/about/jesuit-and-catholic-heritage> (last visited Sept. 30, 2018); *see also Key Facts*, GEORGETOWN U., <https://www.georgetown.edu/about/key-facts> (last visited Sept. 30, 2018).

64. Rachel L. Swarns, *272 Slaves Were Sold to Save Georgetown. What Does It Owe Their Descendants?*, N.Y. TIMES (Apr. 16, 2016), <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/17/us/georgetown-university-search-for-slave-descendants.html>.

65. *Id.*

Institute for Racial Reconciliation (“Winter Institute”) at the University of Mississippi. The Institute has an inspiring vision statement:

[E]nvision[ing] a world where people honestly engage in their history in order to live more truthfully in the present; where the inequities of the past no longer dictate the possibilities of the future. We envision a world where people of all identities are treated equally; where equality of and access to opportunity are available and valued by all; where healing and reconciliation are commonplace and social justice is upheld and honored. We acknowledge and recognize that it is not enough for us to be intentional, but we must be purposeful in making this vision a reality—not only for Mississippi, but for all people.⁶⁶

The Welcome Table, a community building program of the Winter Institute, is part of that purposeful action.

The idea for the Welcome Table can be traced back to Philadelphia, Mississippi, in 2004 when the fortieth anniversary of the Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964 was approaching.⁶⁷ In June 1964, three civil rights workers—one Black Mississippian and two White students from the North—were murdered: James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner.⁶⁸ Though a local Ku Klux Klan leader bragged about ordering the killings, no one was ever charged with the crime.⁶⁹ With that historical backdrop, the community was in disagreement about how to commemorate the town’s role in the struggle for civil rights. Two community leaders, the Black NAACP president and the White newspaper editor, joined with the Winter Institute to facilitate community storytelling sessions where participants built trust among each other and created an oral history project for the town.⁷⁰ Importantly, they worked together to lobby local officials to prosecute the Klan leader, who after forty years was

66. *William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation*, THE WINTER INST., <http://winterinstitute.org/> (last visited July 23, 2018).

67. Barry Yeoman, *Healing Racial Fault Lines*, MINDFUL (Aug. 11, 2016), <https://www.mindful.org/healing-racial-fault-lines/>.

68. *Id.*

69. *Id.*

70. *Id.*

eventually brought to justice.⁷¹ Further illustrating the successes of cross-racial dialogue, the Winter Institute did similar reconciliation work in McComb, Mississippi, known as “the bombing capital of the world” because of the anti-civil rights violence perpetrated there during that era.⁷²

The lessons learned from those experiences led to the Welcome Table framework in use today.⁷³ Participants say that the face-to-face nature of the interaction is a welcome antidote to the disconnection many people feel in our digitally driven society, and connection offers hope for action.⁷⁴ “When you have a group that has some commitment to each other, the group becomes aware of so much in our culture that needs to be worked on. It’s like, ‘I was blind to all of this and now I see it.’ It compels people to action.”⁷⁵

In the spirit of the abolitionists who went door to door, often motivated by their religious beliefs, Latasha Morrison founded Be the Bridge, a grassroots organization rooted in her Christian-faith tradition. The organization encourages the creation of “bridge builder” dialogue groups in local communities focused on racial reconciliation.⁷⁶ As described online:

“Be the Bridge” to Racial Unity is a community of people who share a common goal of creating healthy dialogue about race and racialization in the U.S., with an emphasis on promoting understanding about racial disparities and injustices. The purpose of this forum is to create a safe and positive space for both learners and

71. *Id.*

72. *Id.*

73. *Id.* The three phases include: (1) a period of trust building across racial lines, accomplished through a series of monthly meetings and a weekend retreat built around a curriculum of structured storytelling activities; (2) a period of planning and implementing a community-building group project such as an oral history, after-school mentoring program, or community garden, while monthly workshops still continue; and (3) developing an equity action plan, specifically focused on addressing a structural issue (a policy or practice) that is perpetuating inequity in the community. *Id.*

74. *Id.*

75. *Id.*

76. *Be the Bridge: Equipping the World to Do the Work of Racial Unity*, BE THE BRIDGE, <https://beabridgebuilder.com/> (last visited Sept. 30, 2018).

well-seasoned reconcilers to ask questions and process thoughts and ideas. Our intent is to equip one another to become interracial bridge builders, or ambassadors of racial reconciliation, within our respective communities. The ultimate desire is for the church to become credible witnesses to true biblical oneness.⁷⁷

Like Dr. King, Morrison recognized the fundamental empathy gap that comes from limited interracial contact. In a 2017 interview with *Christianity Today*, she said:

In the aftermath of Trayvon Martin's death, I realized that the reason we have such division [in the church and elsewhere] is because people are not in relationship with one another. We're not in proximity. When you don't have friendships, you assume things about people who are different than you culturally. You won't have empathy, because you don't know anyone who looks like that, or anyone that worships that way, or anyone that dresses that way.⁷⁸

Since its founding in 2014, Be the Bridge has grown rapidly with hundreds of dialogue groups meeting across the U.S. and Canada, and thousands of online subscribers accessing the resources provided there.⁷⁹ These community initiatives offer hope that empathic understanding can be created under the right circumstances.

4. Intergroup Dialogue and Education

In the secular world of higher education, intergroup dialogue is also emerging as an effective tool for building bridges and perhaps reducing what Dr. King referred to as the “fears, prejudice, pride and

77. *Join the Be the Bridge Community Online*, BE THE BRIDGE, <https://beabridgebuilder.com/get-involved/> (last visited Sept. 30, 2018).

78. Morgan Lee, *Latasha Morrison: The Church is the 'Only Place Equipped to Do Racial Reconciliation Well,'* CHRISTIANITY TODAY (Jan. 2017), <https://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2017/january/latasha-morrison-church-is-only-place-equipped-to-do.html>.

79. *Id.*

irrationality, which are the barriers to a truly integrated society.”⁸⁰ The first program of its kind in the nation, the Program on Intergroup Relations (“IGR”) at the University of Michigan is a social justice education program founded in 1988.⁸¹ Unique in its partnership between Student Life and the College of Literature, Science and the Arts, “IGR blends theory and experiential learning to facilitate students’ learning about social group identity, social inequality, and intergroup relations.”⁸² It is intentional in its effort to prepare “students to live and work in a diverse world and educate[] them in making choices that advance equity, justice, and peace.”⁸³

As defined by the Michigan scholar-practitioners, an intergroup dialogue is a facilitated, face-to-face encounter that seeks to foster meaningful engagement between members of two or more social identity groups that have a history of conflict (e.g. Whites and people of color, Arabs and Jews).⁸⁴ Offered as three-credit courses at the University of Michigan, intergroup dialogues are carefully designed to engage students in careful listening and shared exploration of the meanings of social identities, conflict, community, and social justice in those contexts.⁸⁵ Now thirty years old, the Michigan IGR program has been replicated at other institutions and variants of the dialogue program have spread to other campuses.⁸⁶

80. KING, *supra* note 43, at 106.

81. *About the Program on Intergroup Relations*, U. MICH., <https://igr.umich.edu/about> (last visited Sept. 30, 2018). Other programs refer to the curriculum as an Intergroup Dialogue Model (“IGD”).

82. *Id.*

83. *Id.*

84. Ximena Zúñiga & Biren A. Nagda, *Dialogue Groups: An Innovative Approach to Multicultural Learning*, in *MULTICULTURAL TEACHING IN THE UNIVERSITY* 233 (David Schoem, Linda Frankel, Ximena Zúñiga & Edith A. Lewis eds., 1993).

85. *Intergroup Dialogues*, U. MICH., <https://igr.umich.edu/article/intergroup-dialogues> (last visited Sept. 30, 2018). The course structure emphasizes both process and content. *Id.* Using a four-stage model that provides a developmental sequence for the dialogue, the course builds from the establishment of ground rules for dialogue, to exploration of identity, followed by discussions of conflict, then concluding with the possibility of building alliances and shared empowerment. *See also* PATRICIA GURIN, BIREN (RATNESH) A. NAGDA & XIMENA ZÚÑIGA, *DIALOGUE ACROSS DIFFERENCE* 60–72 (2013) (outlining the four-stage model of intergroup dialogue).

86. GURIN, NAGDA & ZÚÑIGA, *supra* note 85 at 4. Other campus examples include Arizona State University, Occidental College, Syracuse University, Univer-

Does dialogue lead to social action? The research evidence suggests the answer is yes! Both White students and students of color demonstrate attitudinal and behavioral changes including: increased self-awareness about issues of power and privilege, greater awareness of the institutionalization of race and racism in the U.S., better cross-racial interaction, less fear of race-related conflict, and greater participation in social-change actions during and after college.⁸⁷ A multi-university study of intergroup dialogue programs found that participants increased their capacity for intergroup empathy and their motivation to connect with people different from themselves.⁸⁸ This is especially significant since longitudinal research shows that these changes endure beyond the time of participation in the dialogues.⁸⁹

The IGR model has recently been adapted for use in high schools. In one study conducted at a racially diverse high school in Michigan, trained college students serving as near-peer facilitators led eight weekly dialogues designed to engage the younger students in exploring identity, building cross-group relationships, and learning how to intervene in intergroup conflict.⁹⁰ As with college students, the dialogues with the younger adolescents were impactful. Students “deepened their ability to think critically about racial issues and listen actively to others’ opinions” proving the dialogues to be “an effective intervention model for promoting civil discourse on race in this hyperpartisan age.”⁹¹

5. Taking Action Together

Can these efforts to promote dialogue work on a larger scale in communities, outside of the structure provided by a school or univer-

sity of California at San Diego, University of Maryland, University of Massachusetts, University of Texas, and University of Washington. *Id.*

87. Kristie A. Ford & Heather J. Lipkin, “*I Wouldn’t Be the Person I Am Without IGR,*” in *FACILITATING CHANGE THROUGH INTERGROUP DIALOGUE: SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY IN PRACTICE* 133, 133–40 (Kristie A. Ford ed., 2018).

88. GURIN, NAGDA & ZÚÑIGA, *supra* note 85, at 157–58, 176–79.

89. *Id.* at 176–79.

90. Donna Rich Kaplowitz, Jasmine A. Lee & Sheri L. Seyka, *Looking to Near Peers to Guide Student Discussions About Race*, *PHI DELTA KAPPAN* (Jan. 22, 2018), <http://www.kappanonline.org/looking-near-peers-guide-student-discussions-race/>.

91. *Id.*

sity? Everyday Democracy, a national organization that has been working since its founding in 1989 “to strengthen democracy by making authentic engagement and public participation a permanent part of the way we work as a country,” knows from experience that such dialogue can.⁹²

Using a convening tool known as “Study Circles,” the Everyday Democracy team has worked with hundreds of communities across the nation, offering small, structured dialogues that have resulted in positive and lasting change.⁹³ Approaching their work through the lens of racial equity, the goal is to help participants gain the knowledge needed to understand the problem of racism in their community, the personal relationships necessary to care about the problem, and the motivation required to take sustained action.

The Kellogg Foundation, one of the nation’s largest private foundations, is another national organization that wants to take these efforts to scale; it invested more than \$200 million in organizations working to heal racial divisions in the United States from 2007 to 2016.⁹⁴ Drawing upon the lessons learned from those investments, in 2016 the Foundation launched its Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation (“TRHT”) Enterprise, described as:

[A] comprehensive, national and community-based process to plan for and bring about transformational and sustainable change, and to address the historic and contemporary effects of racism. It seeks to unearth and jettison the deeply held, and often unconscious, beliefs

92. *About Everyday Democracy*, EVERYDAY DEMOCRACY, <https://www.everyday-democracy.org/about> (last visited Sept. 30, 2018). Sharing what has been learned over almost three decades, Everyday Democracy makes available “an array of flexible resources and discussion guides, technical assistance and coaching, and information about [their] Dialogue to Change process.” *Id.*

93. *History of Everyday Democracy*, EVERYDAY DEMOCRACY, <https://www.everyday-democracy.org/about/history> (last visited Sept. 30, 2018).

94. Gail C. Christopher, *The Time for Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation Is Now*, ASS’N OF AM. COLLS. & UNIVS. (Jan. 13, 2017), <https://aacu.org/liberaleducation/2016/fall/christopher>.

created by racism – the main one being the belief in a hierarchy of human value.⁹⁵

Partnering with more than 100 national and local organizations, diverse and broad in scope, ranging from the American Library Association and the Boys & Girls Clubs of America to the Council of State Governments, the National Association of Community and Restorative Justice, Sundance Institute, and the YWCA USA, to name just a few, the TRHT will “bring together the intellectual power and resources of foundations, communities, government, nonprofits, and corporations in efforts to dismantle racism.”⁹⁶

At the core of its mission is the recognition that it will be necessary to rid ourselves of the belief in a racial hierarchy of human value and replace it with the belief in a shared common humanity, a task much easier said than done. To facilitate this shift in thought, the TRHT suggests that:

Jettisoning belief in a hierarchy of human value—a belief that has been well established in America for four centuries—will require a multipronged, strategic effort to heal the racial wounds of the past and to transform our socioeconomic institutions. These two goals are intimately connected, because belief in racial hierarchy translates into values and principles that influence public, personal, and corporate practices and, thereby, perpetuate biases and inequities based on race and ethnicity.⁹⁷

The TRHT effort is based on lessons learned from the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (“TRCs”) that have been effective in resolving deeply rooted conflicts around the world.⁹⁸ However, the

95. *Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation*, W.K. KELLOGG FOUND., <https://www.wkkf.org/what-we-do/racial-equity/truth-racial-healing-transformation> (last visited Sept. 30, 2018).

96. La June Montgomery Tabron, *The W. K. Kellogg Foundation’s Deepening Commitment to Racial Equity*, ASS’N OF AM. COLLS. & UNIVS. (Jan. 13, 2017), <https://aacu.org/liberaleducation/2016/fall/tabron>.

97. *Planning the Transformation*, ASS’N OF AM. COLLS. & UNIVS. (2016), <https://aacu.org/liberaleducation/2016/fall/planningtransformation>.

98. The best-known example is the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, set up by the Government of National Unity to help deal with the af-

U.S. model emphasizes *transformation* rather than *reconciliation* because in the U.S. the root cause of racial hierarchy is not the result of conflict between groups, rather it is built into the foundational governance structures of the nation.⁹⁹ It has always been there and must be rooted out for lasting progress to take place. Gail Christopher, the vice president for TRHT and senior advisor at the Kellogg Foundation, delineates seven guiding principles that have been developed to undergird this transformational work:

1. “There must be an accurate recounting of history, both local and national.” Truth-telling requires that there be an atmosphere of forgiveness and people of *all* racial, ethnic, and ancestral backgrounds have the opportunity “to tell their stories without fear of recrimination, but with a sense that justice will be served.”
2. “A clear and compelling vision, accompanied by a set of ambitious but achievable goals, both long term and short term, must be developed, and progress must be regularly assessed.”
3. “The process must be expansive and inclusive in all respects, and there must be a deep and unyielding commitment to (a) understanding the different cultures, experiences, and perspectives that coexist in a community; (b) recognizing and acknowledging the

termath of the violence and human rights abuses that occurred under the system of apartheid. *Truth the Road to Reconciliation*, TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMM’N, <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/> (last visited Sept. 30, 2018). Described as “a necessary exercise to enable South Africans to come to terms with their past on a morally accepted basis and to advance the cause of reconciliation,” the TRC sought to restore victims’ dignity and give members of the public a chance to express their regret at failing to prevent human rights violations, as well as formulate policy proposals and recommendations on rehabilitation and healing of survivors, their families, and communities at large. *Id.* Other examples include post-genocidal Rwanda and Kosovo. *Truth Commission: Rwanda 99*, U.S. INST. OF PEACE (Mar. 1, 1999), <https://www.usip.org/publications/1999/03/truth-commission-rwanda-99>; Amire Qamili, *Kosovo President Establishes Truth and Reconciliation Commission Preparatory Team*, PRISHTINA INSIGHT (Dec. 14, 2017), <https://prishtinainsight.com/kosovo-president-establishes-truth-reconciliation-commission-preparatory-team/>.

99. Christopher, *supra* note 94.

interdependence of the variety of approaches to seeking enduring racial equity; (c) reaching out to nontraditional allies in order to broaden support for meaningful change; and (d) giving every participant an opportunity to tell his or her story in a respectful and supportive setting.”

4. “The process of healing requires the building of trust and must be viewed as a ‘win-win’ process,” recognizing that ultimately “we all share a common fate.” “[S]ubstantial and enduring progress toward racial equity and healing benefits all of us.”
5. “There must be a commitment to some form of reparative or restorative justice and to policies that can effectively foster systemic change.”
6. “A thoughtful and comprehensive communications strategy must be designed to keep the entire community informed, even those who are neither involved in, nor supportive of, the process.”
7. “There must be a broadly understood way of dealing with the tensions that inevitably will arise.” If organizations can anticipate “teachable moments,” it is possible to keep moving forward and not become derailed by the tensions of the moment.¹⁰⁰

Core to the success of the social transformation that is being described is the more complete telling of American history *and* developing our capacity to listen deeply to another person’s perspective. It is the cultivation of the capacity to *listen* that is central to the practice of dialogue, perhaps the most effective tool for change in the twenty-first century.

B. *The Issue of Dialogue*

The work of racial dialogue is hard. There is always the risk that offensive statements will be made—by you or toward you. Powerful emotions can be triggered. Discomfort is guaranteed. Many of us learned from an early age that race is a topic to be avoided, particularly in racially mixed company. Some of us learned that it is best to

100. *Id.*

be “color-blind,” that is, to pretend not to notice racial categories. But in doing so, the reality of everyday racism in the lives of people of color is ignored and continues unchallenged. In their book, *The Myth of Racial Color Blindness*, the editors, Helen Neville, Miguel Gallardo, and Derald Wing Sue, explain:

[T]o deny race and ignore the existence of racism actually causes harm to people of color because it (a) falsely perpetuates the myth of equal access and opportunity, (b) blames people of color for their lot in life, and (c) allows Whites to live their lives in ignorance, naiveté, and innocence.¹⁰¹

Some people believe that talking about race will make things worse—that those who bring it up are “playing the race card,” creating problems where otherwise there would be none. Silencing the conversation, however, is just another way to maintain the status quo. You cannot solve a problem without talking about it. Learning how to have this dialogue is a necessary part of moving forward as a healthy society. It is of particular importance that White people who want to see social change learn how to have the conversation, not just with people of color, but with their White peers as well. As Lee Ann Bell writes in *Telling on Racism*, “[r]efusing to talk about powerful social realities does not make them go away but rather allows racial illiteracy, confusion, and misinformation to persist unchallenged.”¹⁰²

Rather than avoiding hard conversations, through dialogue we can help each other see the past more clearly and understand and communicate with others more fully in the present. In the process, we can find ways to work together in coalition for the betterment of our communities in the future.

101. Helen A. Neville, Miguel E. Gallardo & Derald Wing Sue, *Introduction to THE MYTH OF RACIAL COLOR BLINDNESS: MANIFESTATIONS, DYNAMICS, AND IMPACT* 3, 8–9 (Helen A. Neville et al. eds., 2016).

102. Lee Ann Bell, *Telling on Racism: Developing a Race-Conscious Agenda, in THE MYTH OF RACIAL COLOR BLINDNESS: MANIFESTATIONS, DYNAMICS, AND IMPACT*, *supra* note 101, at 105, 107.

IV. CONCLUSION

We are at an important historical moment with regard to our nation's legacy of dealing with race. It is a moment that contains both dangers and opportunities. We can allow the forces leading to greater segregation drive us further apart as a nation, or we can use our leadership as active citizens to engage one another in the work of building community across lines of difference, work that can be done through meaningful cross-racial dialogue.

As Dr. King said, "racial understanding is not something that we find but something that we must create."¹⁰³ *Are we creating it? We could be.* In 1967, Dr. King ended his book, *Where Do We Go From Here?* with these words: "We still have a choice today: nonviolent coexistence or violent coannihilation."¹⁰⁴ But he warns that "[t]his may well be mankind's last chance to choose between chaos and community."¹⁰⁵ If we don't want chaos, we *must choose* community; we *must choose* to listen, even to the stories that are hard to hear and work for *lasting* change so we can all enjoy the fruits of our democracy as a *united* community, together.

103. KING, *supra* note 43, at 28.

104. *Id.* at 202.

105. *Id.*