

## OVERVIEW OF TRHT AND RACIAL HEALING CIRCLES

Good afternoon!

Last week we celebrated Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday. So, I want to begin a description of the Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation process with a quote from Dr. King. My favorite quote comes not from his "I Have a Dream" speech. Rather it comes from multiple sermons that he preached:

*"...we have to face the fact...that modern man suffers from a kind of poverty of the spirit, which stands in glaring contrast to his scientific and technological abundance; We've learned to fly the air like birds, we've learned to swim the seas like fish, and yet we haven't learned to walk the Earth as brothers and sisters..."*

The Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation effort of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation—TRHT—is, in essence, about learning to walk the Earth as brothers and sisters. It is about telling the truth about our past as a means for healing the grievous wounds that past has created, and transforming our society into one in which the humanity of every one of us is cherished and we can see ourselves in one another.

It began as a vision of Dr. Gail Christopher, who was then Vice President for Program Strategy and Senior Policy Advisor at the Kellogg Foundation.

Her vision was that in order to heal the wounds that our historic oppression has created, it is not enough to address the manifestations of our racist past—and present. We must dig deeper to confront the root of that racism—a belief in the myth of a hierarchy of human value based on superficial physical characteristics such as skin color and facial features. It dates back more than 400 years and has been used to justify oppression—past and present. We have seen the manifestation of this myth in oppressions ranging from genocide to enslavement to the theft of land to the fiction of manifest destiny. We have attempted to address these evils over time in a variety of ways, ranging from the Civil War to occasional legislative initiatives. But for every two steps forward, we have taken at least one step back—sometimes two or three steps back.

I was in college during the civil rights movement of the 1960s. I marched, I spent a summer in the South, I sang freedom songs at countless rallies, and I listened in person to Dr. King deliver his “I Have a Dream” speech not far from this hotel. We thought we had won when the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968 were enacted.

But as we can see today in efforts to suppress the vote, the killing of unarmed people of color by law enforcement officials, the re-emergence of neo-Nazism and the affirmative nod to this re-emergence by people in powerful positions, the

re-segregation of our public schools, the backward momentum of fair housing efforts, and the continuing racism and marginalization of students of color on college campuses, our victories are severely threatened. And they are threatened because we were not smart enough or insightful enough at the time to deal with the root cause of racism-- our inability to recognize and cherish our common humanity.

That is what the TRHT is about. It is not about reconciling to some mythical past. It is about telling the truth about our past as a way to heal from the wounds of the past and to unleash the power of our hearts and minds to transform our future and to jettison the racial hierarchy.

It started with a meeting of about 75 people, many of them Kellogg grantees, at the Institute of Peace here in Washington, DC in December of 2015. Over the next six months, largely due to Dr. Christopher's efforts, more than 100 organizations signed on as partners. There were, of course, the ones you would expect—the NAACP, the National Urban League, the National Council of La Raza, the National Congress of American Indians, Asian Americans Advancing Justice, and others. But there also were many that you might not immediately associate with such an effort—the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, the American Public Health Association, the American Library Association, the National League of

Cities, and of course, the Association of American Colleges and Universities, to name just a few.

Because careful planning for an undertaking of this scope is essential for success, these partners were organized into five Design Teams of 20-30 people each:

**Narrative Change**—because we must change the false narratives taught in our schools and emanating from the media if we are to jettison the racial hierarchy myth and sustain change.

**Racial Healing and Relationship Building**—because we must get to know each other in more meaningful ways, understand the harm that racism inflicts on the society as a whole, and reach a level of mutual respect in order to heal ourselves and to advocate successfully for more humane public policies. Dr. King speaks directly to this in another quote:

*“People fail to get along because they fear each other; they fear each other because they don't know each other; they don't know each other because they have not communicated with each other.”*

**Separation**—because a driving force behind the fallacy of a racial hierarchy has been government-incentivized separation of people from different racial and

ethnic backgrounds. This separation creates a significant barrier to the kind of communication to which Dr. King referred.

**Law**—because the creation and perpetuation of the myth is fueled by a legal structure designed with the myth in mind.

**Economy**—because the economic structure rewards those who perpetuate of the myth.

These are the five pillars that sustain the racial hierarchy, and each design team, through in-person meetings and conference calls, spent six months in 2016 addressing five questions within each of these pillars:

**Question 1: What would our country look like/feel like/be like in each area if we jettisoned the belief in a hierarchy of human value?** This offers a vision and a sense of direction about where we are headed and does not limit our focus to a single problem or a single discipline. And it recognizes the reality that the challenges are inter-connected—we cannot deal with the law without dealing with the narrative; we cannot deal with separation without dealing with the economy, etc.

**Question 2: Where are we now, and how did we get here?** Here is where we begin to unearth the truth about our journey of more than 400 years, both locally

and nationally, and learn to acknowledge and accept responsibility for white America's role—whether consciously or sub-consciously—in perpetuating the racial hierarchy. It is the kind of work that has been done by Brown University and Georgetown University, among others.

**Question 3: What are the key leverage points in seeking to jettison a belief in a hierarchy of human value?** Here is where we begin to identify the key pressure points that will begin to yield change in each area.

**Question 4: Who must be involved in order to make the deep and lasting changes we need to make?** Here is where we make sure that this is a diverse and expansive approach that engages every sector of the community—from the grassroots advocacy groups to the chamber of commerce, because that is the best way to ensure sustainable change.

**Question 5: What are the key initial activities that need to occur in order to heal from racism and transform this area?** Here is where we outline the steps along the journey to our vision and take the first steps in that journey.

Each team produced a report, these reports were combined into a single document, and this document, along with an Implementation Guidebook produced by the Kellogg Foundation, served as the basis for the TRHT Summit

held in Carlsbad, CA in December, 2016. From that five-day Summit, which was attended by nearly 600 people, included representatives from almost every partner organization, and featured a panel presentation by Lynn Pasquerella, AAC&U's President, came a wide range of recommendations and activities. Based on the outcomes of the Summit, the Kellogg Foundation is:

- Partnering with local funding sources to support the use of the TRHT framework to promote racial equity and racial healing activities in 14 locations—Los Angeles, CA; St. Paul, MN; Buffalo, NY; Selma, AL; New Orleans and Baton Rouge, LA; Chicago, IL; Dallas, TX; Richmond, VA; the state of Alaska; and Battle Creek, Flint, Lansing, and Kalamazoo, MI.
- Supporting the American Library Association as it seeks to incorporate the TRHT framework into its Great Stories Club Programs in 125 libraries across the country.
- Supporting the National Civic League, which is incorporating the TRHT framework into its All-America Cities program.
- Supporting, in partnership with Newman's Own Foundation, the leadership of the AAC&U in creating TRHT Campus Centers on ten campuses to serve as catalysts for transformation on campus and in the community. Tia will talk more specifically about the TRHT Campus Centers in just a minute.

- Promoting an annual National Day of Racial Healing. The first one was held on the day after the 2017 Martin Luther King holiday, just five weeks after the Summit, and through activities in partner organizations and in communities across the country, it reached more than 1 and ½ million people on Facebook and nearly 50,000 impressions on Twitter. This year it was held this past Tuesday, January 17, the day after Martin Luther King Day and involved a wide range of events, discussions and activities that promoted racial equity and racial healing throughout the country.
- Additionally, we are working with organizations in the health sector, the legal sector, the youth sector, and others to develop similar activities within the TRHT framework in these sectors.

And we are only scratching the surface of the potential impact. It is important to note that the partner organizations together have the potential to reach more than 200 million Americans.

And, the President notwithstanding, polling indicates that there is a growing and unprecedented consensus in this country among all racial and ethnic groups that we must address the racial divisions and disparities that challenge our humanity and stifle our progress. So, I believe that we must take advantage of this moment in time, or to quote Dr. King again, recognize “the fierce urgency of now.”

We don't have any illusions about how difficult this is and how long it will take.

As Chris Edley, a former colleague, has said: "Dealing with issues of race is not rocket science. It's harder than rocket science."

However, as Dr. Vincent Harding, who marched with Dr. King, has said:

"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."

We believe that we are on the cutting edge of a unique effort to transform our society and to build a future in which we cherish the unique characteristics that each of us possesses while treasuring the common humanity that binds us together as brothers and sisters. But it will require us to reach beyond our comfort zones, and as poet Robert Frost has told us— to "take the road less traveled."