INSIGHTS & LESSONS FROM TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMMISSIONS
OVERVIEW

Across the world, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions have been implemented more than 40 times. This publication describes some of those historical efforts, in the United States and internationally, to confront some of the most egregious examples of oppression. It was originally compiled in 2015 as a source of insight and lessons for those who co-developed the W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation (TRHT) framework, recommendations and implementation guidebook.

A note: As you review this publication, please notice a distinguishing feature of TRHT – its intentional focus on healing and transformation, rather than reconciliation. To reconcile suggests that we restore friendly relations – “reuniting” or “bringing together again after conflict.” TRHT efforts seek to envision what could be for our country and communities and to create a new narrative and reality for all people based on our shared humanity.

BACKGROUND

Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation is a national and community-based process to address the historic and contemporary effects of racism and bring about transformational change. At its core, TRHT seeks to unearth and jettison the deeply held, and often unconscious beliefs created by racism – the main one being the belief in a “hierarchy of human value.” This belief has fueled racism and conscious and unconscious bias throughout American culture and the perception of people’s inferiority or superiority based on race, physical characteristics or place of origin.

In 2016, the Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) launched the design of the TRHT effort in the United States. The year-long design phase engaged 176 leaders and scholars from more than 144 organizations. It built upon the wisdom and knowledge gained through several decades of WKKF-supported work to advance racial healing and
racial equity. What emerged was a set of recommendations and a guidebook for implementing the TRHT framework among individuals, organizations, communities and Tribal Nations.

The TRHT Framework consists of five areas. The first two: Narrative Change and Racial Healing and Relationship Building, are foundational pillars for all TRHT work. And, the remaining three areas are Separation, the Law and Economy.

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TRHT is not focused on perpetrators or victims. It is focused on the power that created both, the power of belief – in this case, the belief in a hierarchy of human value. It’s a shared history and a shared journey, with a shared responsibility.

WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about the communities and organizations pursuing TRHT efforts or to download the TRHT Implementation Guidebook and other resources, visit healourcommunities.org.
AUSTRALIA AND THE STOLEN GENERATIONS

AUTHORIZATION
• Community driven initially
• Later taken up by Federal government

STRUCTURE (SCOPE/SCALE/ACTIVITIES)
• National
• Events organized by universities, churches, local councils, community groups
• Sorry Books signed by half a million people; Walks
• 1998 National Sorry Day
• Funding: Private and government

PRECIPITATING EVENT/S
• Forced removal of Aboriginal children and placing them in white institutions or families
• 1997 national inquiry report “Bringing them home” on removal of Aboriginal children

OUTCOMES
• 2008 Formal apology by prime minister with unanimous support
• Significant funds committed to close gaps in key areas of health, education, employment
• Ongoing community commemorations, actions
Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Authorization
- Canadian federal courts agreement
- Precipitating events
- Forced removal of Aboriginal children and placing in Residential Schools
- 1996 Royal Commission Report urged reconciliation
- 2007 Settlement Agreement with survivors included formation of TRC

Structure (Scope/Scale/Activities)
- National
- Widespread public hearings over 6 years
- Seven national 4-day events
- 6000 witnesses
- Funding: Federal
- Outcomes
- Report
- Creation of National Center for Truth and Reconciliation
- Calls to Action with 94 recommendations in education, health, child welfare, criminal justice
- Ongoing
PRESIDENT CLINTON’S INITIATIVE ON RACE

AUTHORIZATION

• President of the United States

STRUCTURE (SCOPE/SCALE/ACTIVITIES)

• National
• All Sectors of Society
• $5 million for 1 year
• Seven member Advisory Board and staff of approximately 40
• Advisory Board meetings in every region of the country,
• Campus Week of Dialogue in which approximately 600 colleges and universities across the country participated,
• National Day of Dialogue in which approximately 125 communities participated,
• Separate convenings of corporate leaders and leaders in the faith community to discuss ways in which they could contribute to racial healing in their institutions,
• Identification of approximately 350 “Promising Practices” in racial reconciliation across the country, and
• Publication, in addition to the final report of the Advisory Board to the President, of an analysis of more than 100 of these “Promising Practices.”
PRECIPITATING EVENT/S

• President Clinton’s re-election and his desire to do something about issues of race.

OUTCOMES

• Report with recommendations for change.
• Dialogue Guide
• Identification of 350 “Promising Practices”
• William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation at the University of Mississippi
• Network of Alliances Bridging Race and Ethnicity (NABRE)—A project of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies
JAPANESE INTERNMENT

AUTHORIZATION
• United States Government

STRUCTURE (SCOPE/SCALE)
• National
• Three years
• Federally-appointed nine-member Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians
• Public hearings

PRECIPITATING EVENT
• Internment of 120,000 Japanese Americans, including 77,000 American citizens, following bombing of Pearl Harbor

OUTCOMES
• Apology
• $20,000 to each of the still living Japanese Americans (approximately 60,000) who were sent to internment camps
• Preservation of 10 detention sites as historical landmarks
THE TUSKEGEE SYPHILIS EXPERIMENT

AUTHORIZATION
• U.S. Government

STRUCTURE (SCOPE/SCALE/ACTIVITIES)
• Class action lawsuit filed by NAACP on behalf of study participants and their descendants
• Tuskegee Syphilis Study Legacy Committee (private, 2 years)

PRECIPITATING EVENT
• U.S. Public Health Service experiment over 40 years (1932–1972) on black men with syphilis

OUTCOMES
• Apology
• $9 million in compensation and free medical and burial services to subjects of experiment and their surviving family members
• New federal regulations governing studies involving human participants
• Establishment of the National Center for Bioethics in Research and Health Care at Tuskegee to explore issues that underlie research and medical care of African Americans and other under-served people
• Establishment of a museum to honor the participants in the study
AUTHORIZATION

• Private 1991

PRECIPITATING EVENT

• Need for Members of Congress of both parties to engage in dialogue on moral/spiritual issues and to address issue of racial history, poverty and violence.

STRUCTURE (SCOPE/SCALE/ACTIVITIES)

• Dialogue and reflection groups
• Annual Congressional pilgrimages to Alabama Civil Rights sites and to South Africa
• Funding: private

OUTCOMES

• New friendships and working relationships
• New awareness and insights among Members
• Some change in voting
• Ongoing
EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND REPENTANCE

AUTHORIZATION
• Episcopal Church national and regional

PRECIPITATING EVENT
• Movement within EC to recognize EC participation/complicity in slavery
• Traces of the Trade film

STRUCTURE (SCOPE/SCALE/ACTIVITIES)
• National
• 2008 resolution of apology
• Call for dioceses to study history and take action to repair the breach
• Screenings of Traces of the Trade
• Dialogues and training
• Funding: Diocesan and private

OUTCOMES
• Continuing dialogues/training
• Local committees
• Decision of Diocese of Rhode Island to convert the Cathedral into a Reconciliation Center
• Ongoing
W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION’S AMERICA HEALING INITIATIVE

AUTHORIZATION
• Non-profit organization

STRUCTURE (SCOPE/SCALE/ACTIVITIES)
• National organizations
• Community-based organizations
• Research institutions
• Communications/media organizations
• Seven years+
• $100 million+

PRECIPITATING EVENT
• No specific event

OUTCOMES
• Distribution of $100 million+ to hundreds of national and community-based organizations working to overcome structural racism and foster racial healing.
• A broader public recognition that an end to racism and to the myth of racial hierarchies will occur only when we heal both collectively and as individuals.
• Greater public awareness of the role of implicit bias in racist behavior.
• Assistance in the development of the Obama Administration’s My Brother’s Keeper initiative.
• Plans to create a Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation undertaking in the United States,
• Development of a vision for the creation of a Global Fund For the Healing From Racism.
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

AUTHORIZATION
• Community initiated
• Led to collaboration with government

PRECIPITATING EVENT/S
• History of slavery, civil war, segregation
• Election of black majority 1977

STRUCTURE (SCOPE/SCALE/ACTIVITIES)
• Regional with national outreach
• 1993 to present History walks, dialogues
• City government creation of Slave Trail Commission
• Consortium of nonprofits, museums, universities, faith groups

OUTCOMES
• 2007 Formal apology by city and state of Virginia
• Creation of Reconciliation Statue
• City and state commitment to national slavery and heritage site
• Ongoing process of education, dialogue, training
• Creation of city Office of Community Wealth Building to address disparities
• Funding: private and government
• Ongoing
PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY, VIRGINIA

AUTHORIZATION
• Virginia State Legislature

STRUCTURE (SCOPE/SCALE/ACTIVITIES)
• Local, within the county
• Focus on education
• Legislative debate

PRECIPITATING EVENT
• Closing of the Prince Edward County public schools for five years as a consequence of the policy of “massive resistance” to school desegregation.

OUTCOMES
• Apology from the state legislature and several churches for the closing of the schools.
• Appropriation of $1 million in public funds, matched by a private philanthropist, providing a total of $2 million for scholarships for African Americans who were deprived of a public school education while the schools were closed.
• Creation of the Robert Russa Moton Museum to chronicle the history of civil rights events in the county.
TULSA, OKLAHOMA

AUTHORIZATION
• Community and government

PRECIPITATING EVENT
• 1921 Riot that destroyed Greenwood district

STRUCTURE (SCOPE/SCALE/ACTIVITIES)
• Local
• 1997 City and state Commission
• State legislature approved college scholarships for descendants of Greenwood residents;
• Creation of a memorial; economic development in Greenwood
• Process largely community driven
• Funding: private and state

OUTCOMES
• 2010 Consortium of academic institutions, historical societies, advocacy and racial healing groups created John Hope Franklin Center for Reconciliation
• Annual forums and other events
• 2010 John Hope Franklin Reconciliation Park
• Steering committee formed on curriculum for Tulsa schools
• 2013 apology by Tulsa police chief
GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

AUTHORIZATION
• Private

PRECIPITATING EVENT
• 1979 shooting by Klansmen and American Nazis

STRUCTURE (SCOPE/SCALE/ACTIVITIES)
• Local
• Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission
• Grassroots organized: faith communities, universities, neighborhoods; mayor’s office
• Hearings, evidence gathering
• Funding: private

OUTCOMES
• Recommendations for public memorials, apologies, and reforms in government, police reviews, wages for city employees, school curriculum.
• Recommendations taken up by community groups—ongoing
• 2015 city council approves historical marker
WILMINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA

AUTHORIZATION
• North Carolina State Legislature created the Wilmington Race Riot Commission

STRUCTURE (SCOPE/SCALE/ACTIVITIES)
• Local
• Evaluation of economic impact and costs to black residents
• Approximately six years

PRECIPITATING EVENT
• 1898 Wilmington Insurrection in which a coup d’etat led by white Democratic Party insurgents overthrew the legitimately elected biracial local government and replaced the city’s duly elected officeholders with white supremacists.

OUTCOMES
• Report with recommendations designed to strengthen black inclusion in economic development activities.
• Official acknowledgement and renouncing by North Carolina Democratic Party of the actions of party leaders during the insurrection and white supremacy campaigns.
• Resolution adopted by state senate acknowledging and expressing “profound regret” for the 1898 event.
ROSEWOOD, FLORIDA

AUTHORIZATION
• Florida House of Representatives

STRUCTURE (SCOPE/SCALE/ACTIVITIES)
• Legislative report

PRECIPITATING EVENT
• 1923 massacre of black residents of Rosewood, FL as a result of a rumor that a white woman has been sexually assaulted by a black man in a nearby community who was allegedly hiding in Rosewood.

OUTCOMES
• Legislation granting “equity, justice, fairness and healing” to survivors of the massacre and providing $2.1 million in reparations to survivors.
MAINE WABANAKIE-STATE CHILD WELFARE
TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

AUTHORIZATION
• Governor, in collaboration with five tribal chiefs, created the Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth & Reconciliation Commission

STRUCTURE (SCOPE/SCALE/ACTIVITIES)
• Approximately two and ½ years
• Investigate “whether or not the removal of Wabanaki children from their communities has continued to be disproportionate to non-Native children and to make recommendations that can promote individual, relational, systemic and cultural reconciliation.”

PRECIPITATING EVENT
• Disparate treatment of Wabanaki children over a lengthy period of time.

OUTCOMES
• Report by Commission recommending a range of actions for addressing the inequities it found. (Since the report was issued in June 2015, there has not been sufficient time to assess the full impact)
• In addition to recommendations specific to the operation of the Maine child welfare system, the Commission advocated that the people of Maine:
  • “Respect tribal sovereignty and commit to resolve and uphold federal, state and tribal jurisdictions and protocols at both state and local levels, and
  • “Honor Wabanaki choices to support healing as the tribes see fit and celebrate the cultural resurgence of the tribes within the Wabanaki confederacy so that both individuals and communities may be strengthened.”
AUTHORIZATION
• Brown University President

STRUCTURE (SCOPE/SCALE/ACTIVITIES)
• Brown University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice
• Investigate and prepare a report about the University’s historical relationship to slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.
• Reflect on the meaning of this history in the present and on the complex historical, political, legal, and moral questions posed by any present-day confrontation with past injustice.
• Make recommendations on actions the University might take to address these questions.
• Research, public meetings, solicitation of written comments
• Three years

PRECIPITATING EVENT
• No specific event beyond the appointment of an African American woman as president of the university.

OUTCOMES
• Report containing a range of recommendations for action within the university and within the broader community, including acknowledgment, memorialization, ongoing research, and expanded opportunities for those disadvantaged by the legacies of slavery and the slave trade.
• Positive university responses to many of the recommendations, including an update in 2011.
WILLIAM WINTER INSTITUTE FOR RACIAL RECONCILIATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

AUTHORIZATION
• Chancellor of the University of Mississippi

STRUCTURE (SCOPESCALE/ACTIVITIES)
• Ongoing, staffed office on the campus of the university
• Sixteen years and continuing
• Work on racial healing—public meetings, healing dialogues, conferences, Welcome Table events, etc.—in many communities throughout the state and, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, in New Orleans
• Advocacy for change

PRECIPITATING EVENT
• Public meeting on campus of members of the Advisory Board to President Clinton’s Initiative on Race and preliminary work prior to the public meeting of committees focused on specific issues in Mississippi.

OUTCOMES
• Wide range of ongoing racial healing activities in communities throughout the state
• Development of civil rights curriculum for the state
• Memorialization of efforts by James Meredith to desegregate the university.
• Programming for emerging civil right museum
• Formation of an Alliance for Truth and Racial Reconciliation composed of groups throughout the Deep South.