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Collective Transitions and Community Resilience in the Face of Enduring Trauma

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Failure to remember, collectively, triumphs and accomplishments diminishes us. But failure to remember, collectively, injustice and cruelty is an ethical breach. It implies no responsibility and no commitment to prevent inhumanity in the future. Even worse, failures of collective memory stoke fires of resentment and revenge.

—Martha Minow, *Memory and Hate*

Introduction

- A student leader of African and Asian ancestry who is running for president of a major university's student council is assaulted by a white youth spewing racial epithets.
- A series of attacks on white male university students by groups of younger black males befuddles community leaders.
- An anxious, elderly African American gentleman, accompanied by his daughter and granddaughter, enters a university office to ask permission to take photographs of the building where several decades earlier he and others were assaulted and then arrested, despite their nonviolent response, as they protested the owner's defiant segregation of dining facilities.

The community of these events is Charlottesville, and the university is the University of Virginia. That building is now the office of one of the coauthors of this article. But this community could also be anywhere; the incidents, everyone's; the responses (and nonresponses) to dramatic harm, ubiquitous.

Our thesis is straightforward: First, deep trauma from substantial injustice often leaves people with losses that go unacknowledged and with impacts that can endure over years and even generations.¹ Second, historical community trauma that is not fully acknowledged and addressed leaves communities less resilient—less able to respond and adapt in the face of new stresses and harms. Third, successful transition, or the internal process

of how individuals and communities respond effectively to change, can only occur when that loss is acknowledged and addressed.

In communities where such “unrightable wrongs”² have occurred, efforts to put the past behind that do not acknowledge and address the historical trauma or historical patterns of injustices can reinforce the original problems that led to the traumas in the first place, making the wrongs more difficult to face than they were originally. This reinforcement is so, because different community members understand the historic events or patterns of injustice in different ways, if they attend to them at all; and, therefore, their understandings of present problems and how to deal with them are similarly divided. With a divided understanding of the nature of present problems, addressing those problems in an effective and sustainable way becomes difficult, if not impossible, for community leaders. Furthermore, as we will argue, without a collective effort to acknowledge and address the historical event or patterns, these divisions may deepen, making a community less able to respond in a unified way to new traumatic events. For a visual explanation of this cycle, see figure 10.1.

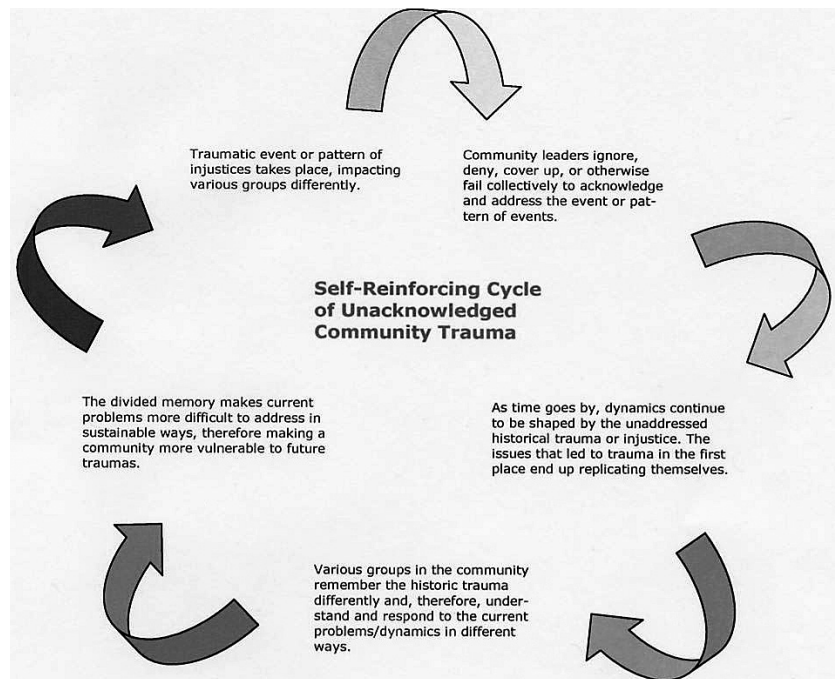


Figure 10.1
Self-reinforcing cycle of unacknowledged community trauma

How Is this Cycle Related to Resilience?

Our use of resilience follows the definition offered by Ozawa in chapter two of this volume. She notes that “a resilient community may be defined as a community that is able to respond to unexpected and unwelcomed events in ways that enable groups and individuals to work together to minimize the adverse consequences of such crises. A resilient community is adaptable, not rigid.” This definition connotes self-awareness within a given community of its areas of vulnerability, along with a capacity for collaborative planning, preparation, and adaptation for crisis.

From this perspective, endurance alone is not necessarily a positive quality. As noted by Goldstein and Butler in chapter 14 and Zellner, Hoch, and Welch in chapter 3, a desired state of resilience may be blocked by problems of stability and the persistence of less-desired characteristics, and thus resistance to needed adaptive change. For instance, the economic system that enslaved black people in the United States was persistent and durable enough to survive an enormous disruption—the loss of the Civil War and Emancipation—and recover and endure for another several generations.

The communities existing within this economic system were further divided—in terms of race and class—by the endurance of the system. These entrenched divisions rendered these communities less resilient, or less able to respond, adapt, and recover in unified, sustainable ways to future traumas. So the persistence of the divisive economic system actually resulted in *less* resilient communities. Our argument is that resilience of any particular community depends upon that community’s ability collectively to acknowledge, understand, and transition away from the systems that have enabled past harmful action to take place. Without that transition, the systems that led to the original and subsequent traumas will be enduring at the expense of the community’s resilience.

Chaskin (2001) argues that a shared sense of community and a level of commitment among community members are basic to a community’s capacity to address challenges.³ According to Chaskin, community capacity develops as members come to see that they have a stake in the well-being of a particular community; with that stake comes a willingness to act to support that community.

Thus a community whose members have varying levels of commitment to that community is more likely to have a divided response when trauma occurs. As Putnam (2000) has documented, when community ties deteriorate, the capacity to prevent or to solve problems declines; conversely, as

community bonds strengthen, so too does such capacity increase. Social capital—those connections among individuals created by shared efforts and other experiences that foster norms of reciprocity and that generate trust—must then be a key part of resilience in the face of trauma.

Thus, improving resilience requires intervening in that cycle of unacknowledged community trauma. A legitimate intervention into this cycle depends upon public knowledge, public understanding, and public acknowledgment of past events in order to avoid repeating oppression, injustice, and mistakes, and revictimizing communities and individuals still affected by the wrong.

Unfortunately, community leaders who are best positioned to facilitate such interventions may resist efforts to pay attention to these events. There can be a variety of reasons for that resistance. They may not be fully aware of that trauma or they may disagree that the trauma is linked to contemporary issues. They may see the connection but fear a loss of their own power or other interests should recognition occur. Or they may be managing many changes at once. Therefore, a significant barrier to interventions that acknowledge and address historical traumas is the challenge of developing a sense of urgency in those who resist facing the past.

Why Is It So Difficult to Face the Past?

The sense of urgency about addressing the historic event or pattern of events differs depending, among other things, on one's connection to the original injustice, pattern of injustice, or conflict. In other words, if I believe that I or my identity group continue to suffer from some legacy of the original harm, I may feel a stronger sense of urgency about addressing that original harm.⁴ If, on the other hand, I either benefit from or do not feel a direct connection to the historical event (which are often one and the same), then I will feel less urgency about addressing the original harm and may even argue strongly against a process of addressing that original event or pattern of events.

In the United States, these divided understandings of history and therefore the present are never more blatant than in the face of new traumas. Consider the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina; fully 90 percent of African Americans but only 38 percent of whites thought Katrina showed that racial inequities were still a problem in this country. Furthermore, 84 percent of African Americans believed that the federal government's response would have been quicker if the victims had been

predominantly white, while only 20 percent of whites had that belief (Dawson 2006).

Surely it is not overly speculative to presume that most of those whites who disagreed that Katrina revealed lingering racial inequities think that the array of civil rights victories this country has seen since the mid-19th century—the Emancipation Proclamation, the desegregation of lunch counters and schools, the Voting Rights Act, or even the first black president—demonstrate that there has been sufficient progress in ending the legacies of slavery and segregation in this country. At the same time, surely most of the African Americans and whites who thought that Katrina showed that racial inequities were still a problem believe that the harmful legacy of slavery and segregation continues. The divided nature of the community's understanding of the human factors that led to the tragedy—unfair decision-making systems that disproportionately harm communities of color and poor people—simultaneously increased the resilience of these systems while decreasing the community's ability to recover from the new trauma inflicted by the storms.

A Framework for Transitions

William Bridges, a leading author and consultant in the field of organizational development, provides an explanation of resistance. Bridges (1991) draws a critical distinction between a *change* (such as the end of legal segregation) and *transition* (or the process that we go through to come to terms with that change). While the change can happen almost immediately, Bridges says, a transition can take days, weeks, years, or even decades. This distinction sheds light on the divided analyses about Hurricane Katrina mentioned previously. The whites who claim that there are no lingering racial inequities in the United States may point to the external changes of civil rights victories as markers for the end of the old way of being and the beginning of the new. But what this group fails to acknowledge or understand is the lack of a transition through which a critical mass of U.S. residents came to terms with that change. Without that transition, much of the United States remains still stuck in the old way of being; and the economic, social, and political systems that were a part of that old way of being persist in spite of other changes.

According to Bridges, the process of transition begins with an ending. People cannot begin a new project or new stage of life until they have released their hold on the way things were and have dealt with the loss of past behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, hopes, and fears. After the old ways of

thinking and behaving are gone—but before the new ways have become second nature—there is an awkward in-between time called the *neutral zone*. The neutral zone is usually chaotic, and there is often a desire to return to what is old and familiar. But this zone can also be a very creative time. A new beginning takes place when people are emotionally ready to do things in a whole new way

Examples of change for individuals might be moving to a new city, losing a job, or getting married. At the organizational level, change might be new leadership, layoffs, or expansion. This change can be either positive or negative, but it is generally experienced as a “particular moment” in time. Bridges suggests that too often people are expected to adapt to the change without being guided through the transition processes: acknowledging what they are losing, finding their way through the chaos and creativity of the neutral zone, and finally being able to join the new beginning. At the individual level, Bridges’s argument is that for a person to successfully engage that change, that individual would have to go through the endings and neutral zone in order to actually take up a new beginning.

The Andrus Family Fund (AFF) believes that the theory of transitions is as true for communities as for individuals and organizations, and that communities in conflict benefit from processes that allow them to acknowledge all the aspects of transition behind whatever change—imposed or aspirational—they are experiencing. AFF’s grant-making strategy in its community-reconciliation program is to offer support to communities struggling (a) with how to come to terms with an imposed change (e.g., climate change, loss of natural resources, or budget cuts); (b) to collaboratively design changes in order to improve the community (e.g., creating systems of accountability for government institutions or creating plans to address the achievement gap in schools); or (c) most often, to do both.

The following three case studies, two of which have been funded by the Andrus Family Fund, describe three different communities where egregious harm occurred some years ago. After periods of denial or cover-up, each of those communities has made efforts to understand and address that harm. These efforts are designed to help communities come to terms with past-imposed changes while also collaboratively defining and implementing aspirational changes for the future. If our hypothesis is correct, successful efforts of this sort can lead to a transition that strengthens a community’s resilience. One community, Bainbridge Island, Washington, appears to have been successful in supporting that transition. In another community,

Greensboro, North Carolina, the record is mixed. For the third community, the University of Virginia and its surroundings in Charlottesville and Albemarle County, its journey is ongoing.

Transitions and Resilience: Three Cases

Nidoto Nai Yoni: “Let It Not Happen Again”

One of the most beautiful places in the United States is also the home of one of its most shameful and painful episodes.⁵

From Bainbridge Island, home to some 23,000 people, residents possess spectacular views of Mt. Rainier, the Seattle skyline that is some twenty-five minutes away by ferry, and the Olympic and Cascade mountain ranges. On March 30, 1942, 227 Bainbridge Island men, women, and children of Japanese ancestry—more than half of whom were U.S. citizens—were not enjoying these views. Instead, they began their long trek into betrayal, as they left the island under armed guard to what was for them an unknown destination. These people were the first of more than 120,000 citizens and immigrants in the United States to be imprisoned under Presidential Executive Order 9066 and Civilian Exclusion Order No. 1. These Japanese Americans, many of them American citizens, did not know at the time that their imprisonment would last for three long years and take them from Manzanar in California’s Mojave Desert to Minodoka Relocation Center in Idaho, or that only 150 of them would eventually return.

These residents had less than one week’s notice to close their businesses, store their belongings, make arrangements for their homes and land, and choose which parts of their lives to fit within a single suitcase. Those who were able to return came back to find a changed landscape. A few found a welcome, and their property maintained by caring neighbors. Others found nothing remaining for them.

Fast forward some fifty years or so. Bainbridge Island is again in the news for a different type of shameful event. A creosote plant on Bainbridge Island severely contaminated the harbor with wastewater discharged directly into the water and treated timber stored in the waters, while shipyard pollution contributed dangerous chemicals and heavy metals to those same waters. The Environmental Protection Agency placed the site on the “National Priorities List,” more commonly known as “Superfund,” reserved for those sites most harmful to human health and the environment.

These sites typically provide significant environmental and social challenges (Dukes 2006). For many communities, discovery of the harm done to the environment and the risks to public health engender both well-founded and unfounded fears. Community members often feel betrayed by the owners of these sites as well as public officials entrusted with their safety.

This time, though, the challenge of dealing with economic loss and contamination is prompting a focus on *transition* rather than change. Besides the complex and long-term cleanup that will continue for many years, the Bainbridge Island residents are finding a way to recover both land and community. The community is taking a site that has been contaminated both physically and psychically and turning it into a place of memory and education.

The site of the memorial will be at the former Eagledale ferry landing, the very location that saw the Japanese Americans forcibly marched off of Bainbridge Island, and part of the Superfund site.⁶ The words of the memorial committee demonstrate its members' recognition of the linkage between environmental and psychic contamination:

Restoration— both environmental and cultural— is the story of the Wyckoff Superfund site.

Restoring a previously contaminated environment polluted by nearly 100 years of creosote processing, and showcasing the good work of government and what technology can do to return balance and harmony with nature.

Restoring national honor by recognizing the unconstitutional treatment of American citizens in a time of war, and through reflection and interpretation, inspiring all Americans to remember, learn, and hopefully protect the constitutional rights for all. (from Wyckoff Park/Memorial Proposal, no longer accessible at original site <http://www.bijac.org/>)

This process of memorialization itself has fostered a transition. For Japanese Americans, it has led to a recognition and acknowledgment of their loss as they have received support from sources as diverse as the Washington State Legislature, the Suquamish Tribe, the American Legion, and Bainbridge Island City Council. For others, this process has allowed them to take pride in their community's response to the contamination and to come together over two events that could have polarized their community for many decades. We suggest that by acknowledging the history and the loss created by the removal of Japanese Americans (and the subsequent absence of widespread public recognition of that harm), the community is better able to move through the stages of the transition process and thus become more resilient.

Greensboro

Like many of its neighbors in North Carolina, the South, and the United States in general, the city of Greensboro⁷ has a long history of substandard living and working conditions for people of color and poor people. This historic pattern has been regularly reinforced by laws, policies, and practices biased against these groups and by public and private institutions condoning and even provoking violence against organizers who challenge those structures. On November 3, 1979, the already divided city experienced another trauma that further divided the community.

On that day, a caravan of Klansmen and neo-Nazis confronted demonstrators planning for an anti-Klan march. The demonstrators chanted the slogan “Death to the Klan.” A stickfight ensued between the demonstrators and white supremacists; then several Klansmen and neo-Nazis returned to their vehicles, retrieved their weapons, and opened fire on mostly unarmed demonstrators. While four news crews captured the unfolding events on film, the white supremacists shot and killed five demonstrators and wounded ten others. The virtual absence of the Greensboro Police Department was notable, given the parade permit the department issued to the parade organizers (a group called the Workers Viewpoint Organization that would later call itself the Communist Workers Party, or CWP). Another odd fact regarding the virtual absence of the police was that department detectives were in regular contact with their paid informant in the Klan who helped to organize the counter-demonstration.

Later, the white supremacist shooters claimed self-defense and were acquitted by all-white juries in both a state and a federal criminal trial. A third, federal civil trial jury found the shooters, as well as two Greensboro police officers and their paid Klan informant, jointly liable for the wrongful death of one of the five killed. On their behalf, the city of Greensboro paid damages of nearly \$400,000 to the victim’s widow and to two injured protestors.

Although decades have passed since the shootings, emotions still run high when the memory is recalled in Greensboro. Many believe that the divided memories of the events contribute to the difficulty in solving current problems. One of those community members is Carolyn Allen, Greensboro mayor from 1993 to 1999, who recalled:

In returning to the political scene here—just sort of gradually as months and years went by—I began to see that many of our racial difficulties were related to a lack of trust, and much of that all seemed to head back to the ’79 events. (Allen 2005)

In 2001, community members—including Allen, surviving former CWP demonstrators, religious leaders, and others—embarked on an unprecedented grassroots effort to seek truth and work toward reconciliation around the 1979 events. With support from the Andrus Family Fund and the International Center for Transitional Justice, the group adapted the truth and reconciliation model used most famously in South Africa and Peru after oppressed groups took power.

In 2004, the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission was sworn in and began its work of seeking the truth around the context, causes, sequence, and consequence of the events of November 3, 1979. During its nearly two years of work, the Commission interviewed approximately 150 people, including former members of the Communist Workers' Party, residents of the Morningside Homes housing project, police officers, current and former Klansmen and neo-Nazis, defense attorneys, prosecutors, and even the judge in the state murder trial. The Commission hosted three two-day public hearings during which 54 speakers publicly shared their understandings of what happened, why, and what should be done to address it. The Commission also engaged the community in numerous ways—through blogs, a public access television show, a door-to-door campaign, newsletters, dialogs, and community workshops.

Divided Community Memories

Nearly everyone in Greensboro who had any memory of the 1979 event had strong feelings both about what happened and about the pending truth and reconciliation process. During a door-to-door campaign, the members and staff of the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission (GTRC) found support and opposition in both white and black communities, but the sources of that opposition and support were quite different.

Dr. Mary Johnson echoes many of her white neighbors when she says that she sees the 1979 shootings as disconnected from the city itself. As she wrote on a local blog:

As I have said before, the Greensboro I know and love and have experienced my whole life has NOTHING to do with the freakish aberration of one day in 1979. . . . Greensboro is also the home of the Woolworth's sit-ins and I daresay that is what people in San Francisco and Boston and Seattle and New York City would think of FIRST if someone would just let them. MANY RESIDENTS of Greensboro in 2006 are saying, PLEASE LET THEM.⁸

Although many white residents shared a sense that the 1979 events did not reflect a systematic problem in the local government institutions, several did support the truth and reconciliation process because of a sense

that there was a need to foster better relationships between the city's white and black communities. These white residents tended to emphasize the "reconciliation" aspect of the GTRC process over the goals related to truth seeking.

For others, like Lewis A. Brandon, III, an African American civic leader who, among other things, participated in the famous sit-ins at the whites-only lunch counter at Greensboro's Woolworths in 1960, the anti-Klan march was one of many challenges to the racist and classist status quo in the city:

I don't know of any social change that occurred in this community without a struggle. . . . That's the Greensboro I know. Change doesn't come because of the goodness of people in the community. People have to struggle. People have to fight to get change in this community.⁹

Although most of Greensboro's black residents shared Brandon's sense that the 1979 events were but one example of the city's racist and classist history, many openly opposed the GTRC process. The reasons for this opposition varied widely and ranged from a lack of time to devote to the process, to a sense of hopelessness that anything would change as a result of the process, to a fear that their participation would result in retaliation from the police department, the Klan, their bosses, and landlords. Those black residents who openly supported the GTRC process, however, emphasized the importance of a collective acknowledgment of the "truth" surrounding the 1979 events.

What Does the Past Have to Do with New Traumas?

During the course of the Commission's work, more problems were brewing within the Greensboro Police Department. The department's special intelligence division was accused of targeting black officers and other black community members with a "black book" and other unethical and unfair surveillance tactics. The former mayor Carolyn Allen's observations about the lingering impacts of the divided community memories were supported as conversations about the new scandal inevitably brought up disputes about the events of November 3, 1979. (Figure 10.2 shows an illustration that one local political cartoonist drew about the events and the efforts to address the events with the community.)

What Is Reconciliation, and Has It Been Achieved in Greensboro?

Michael Ignatieff says that the best outcome a truth commission can hope for is to narrow the range of permissible lies a community tells about



Figure 10.2
Cartoon by Anthony Piraino, <http://pleadthefirst.com>, January 22, 2006. Reprinted with permission.

itself (Hayner 2001). If that is the ultimate goal of a TRC, then the process in Greensboro has been partially successful. Some of the inaccuracies repeated regularly in the local daily paper and anecdotally around town about the 1979 events—that the police were absent from the scene because they were confused about the starting point of the march, and because they did not realize that that white supremacists were on their way to disrupt the march—have been challenged successfully through the process, most notably with the publication and release of the GTRC’s final report in May, 2006. Since that time, media accountings of the events of 1979 have included fewer inaccuracies than before the report was released.

But, so far, most would agree that the “reconciliation” aspect of the process has not been fully realized. In fact, some, mostly white, residents argue that the city is more sharply divided along race and class lines now than it was before the process was initiated. Leaders in the GTRC process believe that these people make that argument because, prior to the TRC process, most residents were unaware of the racial divides and disparities prevalent in Greensboro. The TRC process opened up the opportunity for black residents and others to talk openly about these divides; and it also thrust those issues and stories into the local media, making it impossible for many white residents to continue ignoring them.

In Bridges's terms, the process forced them into an "ending." No longer can those residents pretend that the disparities—in terms of relationships to government institutions, housing, health care, education, and so forth—do not exist. No longer can they pretend that the events of November 3, 1979, occurred in a vacuum with no connection to other parts of Greensboro's reality. Some of the discomfort being experienced by some residents now is the mourning that comes with that ending. The loss of their old way of seeing their city creates feelings of depression and anxiety. Other residents are in the neutral zone, having acknowledged and having let go of their old way of seeing the city, but not yet to a place of settling into a new way of being. It remains to be seen whether a critical mass of Greensboro's residents have sufficiently acknowledged these disparities and unjust histories and will find a new beginning sufficient to rectify the systems that have allowed these disparities and injustices to exist in the first place.

Confronting the Legacy of Slavery, Segregation, and Discrimination at the University of Virginia

One of the coauthors has been working at the university since 1990,¹⁰ and he has been privileged in recent years to teach on the lawn of the university, in one of the pavilions originally built to house faculty and classes and still used for that same purpose.

On the first day of each class, he asks the students, "Who built this place?"

They all look uncertain; they probably think it's a trick question, because they have already been told that Thomas Jefferson built the university. So when he tells them, "This building was built with labor provided by slaves," they are taken aback.

They continue to be taken aback as they realize that not just that building, but the whole University of Virginia was built with slave labor, that the university faculty and graduates perpetuated slavery, segregation, and discrimination on many levels and for many decades, and that the legacy of that history continues today.

Many changes have been made. African Americans now hold key leadership posts at administrative and student levels. African American alumni are among the most respected and beloved names associated with the university. The graduation rate among African Americans is consistently the highest among all public universities in the entire country. The university

instituted a highly regarded financial aid program to encourage greater access to all students from lower-income families.

Many in the university community take great pride in those efforts. Yet, while major change has occurred, a complete transition yet remains. The legacy of slavery and segregation has by no means been fully explored; it is not fully understood and has not been fully addressed.¹¹ Many African Americans and others in the community view the university not as an economic and community asset but as an uncaring and even oppressive institution. African Americans are far more likely to be found in the classrooms after hours as custodians than during class time as instructors.¹² Manifest injustices of continuing racial disparities of health, wealth and poverty, housing, and education remain highly visible in the Charlottesville community. Locally, the university continues to be described as “The Plantation.”

These conditions and others demonstrate a legacy that leaves the university and surrounding community less resilient. This condition is shown through incidents such as the attacks previously described and through community responses to university efforts that view such efforts through a thick lens of distrust.

Institutional Acknowledgment and the “University and Community Action for Racial Equity” Project

In spring 2007, Virginia’s General Assembly concluded a bitter debate by endorsing an expression of regret—pointedly *not* an apology—that included powerful language, despite its limitations (emphasis added):

- WHEREAS, *the most abject apology for past wrongs cannot right them . . . the spirit of true repentance on behalf of a government, and, through it, a people, can . . . avert the repetition of past wrongs and the disregard of manifested injustices;*
- WHEREAS, *the story of Virginia’s Native Americans and the enslavement of Africans and their descendants . . . and . . . the faith, perseverance, hope, and endless triumphs of Native Americans and African Americans . . . should be embraced, celebrated, and retold for generations to come;*
- RESOLVED . . . the General Assembly hereby *acknowledge with profound regret* the involuntary servitude of Africans and the exploitation of Native Americans . . .
- RESOLVED FURTHER, . . . the General Assembly *call upon the people of the Commonwealth to express acknowledgment and thanksgiving* for

the contributions of Native Americans and African Americans to the Commonwealth and this nation. . .

The Board of Visitors of the University of Virginia followed with their own endorsement of the General Assembly's action. That endorsement included this language (emphasis added):

- WHEREAS, the *Board of Visitors commends the governor and the General Assembly* for these actions and *expresses its regret* for the institution of slavery in this state; and
- WHEREAS, the *mostly anonymous laborers employed in the construction of the University were both enslaved and free*, as was the University's workforce between 1825 and 1865; and
- WHEREAS, *the board expresses its particular regret for the employment of enslaved persons* in these years;
- RESOLVED, the Board of Visitors recommits itself to the principles of equal opportunity and to the principle that *human freedom and learning are and must be inextricably linked* in this commonwealth and in this republic.

Undoubtedly, both the Virginia General Assembly and the University Board of Visitors believed that their actions provided an ending of the debate over responsibility for past actions. However, others at the University of Virginia viewed these statements not as a closed door. Rather, the statements provide an opening for a long-overdue examination of the university's history of slavery and segregation, as well as its continuing impact within and outside of the university community.

This examination is taking place as we write this chapter. A systematic, coordinated effort (involving university students, administration faculty and staff, alumni, and community members) is defining how the university community can complete the transition from its continuing legacy of slavery and segregation to a community of shared purpose. This examination, which has come to be called *University and Community Action for Racial Equity* (UCARE), is aimed at transitioning to a community in which recognition and understanding of all of the past, the bad and the good, allows the university and surrounding community to develop authentic relationships based upon integrity, trust, accomplishment, and shared purpose. The goal is to understand history but no longer to be defined by that history. As new challenges inevitably arise, the university and surrounding community will no longer be divided along racial lines in the same ways that limit its capacity. In short, they will be more resilient.

The exact nature of this work is being defined by those who become engaged in the UCARE process.¹³ Many members of the University of Virginia community want to address the continuing legacy of slavery, segregation, and discrimination with honesty and courage. They want understanding and recognition of these wrongs, acknowledgment of institutional and individual roles in perpetuating these wrongs, and responsible actions that address any continuing legacy of those wrongs. They want a community in which *all* of its members, not just those of a certain race, share the same educational and economic opportunities and share the same opportunities to lead healthy, safe, and rewarding lives.

The initial convening stage for UCARE, which laid the groundwork for this effort, consisted of an entire year of quiet interviews and discussions with key university and community stakeholders. These interviews introduced parties to the project concept, helped refine the necessary scope of the project, identified a growing list of additional interested parties, generated ideas for ways of improving the process, and identified concerns and roadblocks to be addressed before moving forward.

This initial work resulted in a working vision and mission. The vision is *to move from a position of privilege and benevolence to a position of responsibility and action, in order to reconcile the past and the present.* The working mission is *for concerned University of Virginia faculty, staff, and students as well as community members to meet on a regular basis to propose actions and engage with relevant questions in order to achieve this vision.*

The rationale for that vision is to change how the university engages the community. The university already is actively engaged in the community in many ways, with activities that arguably bring many tangible benefits to that community. Yet those actions stem not from recognition that current conditions are in any way tied to the past, but instead from motivations such as a sense of active citizenship, a concern with being a good neighbor, or efforts to improve public relations. Missing from these actions is understanding and acknowledgment of the devastating and enduring impact that the university has had due to its institutional support for slavery, racial segregation, and discrimination.

That impact is real, and its legacy is seen in conditions at the university and in surrounding communities. The vision makes salient that link.

As this book goes to press, substantial work has been completed. This work includes the following activities:

- An initial series of interviews and small-group meetings, growing the project from a handful of founders to hundreds of participants

- Development of a steering committee representing community as well as university staff, faculty, and students
- A series of roundtable dialogs bringing together between twenty-five to forty-five members of the university and surrounding communities
- Several student-focused meetings with diverse student leadership
- Action Group meetings of ten to twenty people focused on three themes—truth and understanding, repair, and relationships—that developed ideas for actions that would enact the UCARE vision
- Numerous community and university administration and class presentations, discussions, and small-group meetings

This work has led to the following efforts, to date:

- *University of Virginia History: Race and Repair* This pioneering course focused on university–community history attracted fifteen students and fifteen noncredit (no cost) community members. It was cotaught by university professors and the director of a community advocacy organization. Besides introducing students to the topic, the course conducted archival research and oral histories. It concluded with a widely attended community forum.
- *Memorializing History* A student-led effort endorsed by the student council is developing a competition for a memorial for slavery and other aspects of racialized history. This memorial effort has generated considerable university and community support.
- *Orientations for Student Volunteers* UCARE students are working with Madison House (the University clearinghouse for several thousand student volunteers each year) to improve understanding of the racial dimensions of local history, particularly concerning university–community relations, as well as cultural competency.
- *Networking Meetings* UCARE was asked to help collect information and encourage networking of individuals and organizations who work for racial equity. Networking meetings concerning health care and housing, respectively, have been held that have allowed for people from the community and the university to meet one another, share information, and coordinate actions.
- *Charlottesville Dialogue on Race* The Dialogue, initiated in 2009, is intended to “identify problems and propose concrete solutions and paths to action that promote racial reconciliation, economic justice and equity.” UCARE had three participants on the Dialogue steering committee and provided a student intern and other assistance, and UCARE is deeply involved in follow-up actions.

- *Engaging University Administration* UCARE participants have drafted a set of policy recommendations that recognize the influence of the university in areas such as employment and affordable housing.

The transition sought in this work is substantial. At least two major communities can be identified which have not realized an ending to date. UCARE hopes to create an ending for many white people by promoting an understanding of the consequences that racial privilege has extended, as well as an understanding that the changes UCARE seeks in fact reinforce rather than violate widespread conceptions of fairness, justice, and equity. For many members of the African American community, an ending would come from the widespread understanding and acknowledgment of the impact of slavery, segregation, and discrimination after decades of lies, obfuscation, and basic forgetting, followed by actions to address the inequities that exist today as a result of those wrongs.

Conclusions

We hypothesize that contemporary community problems may be rooted in or exacerbated by past harms. Communities that do not include some effort at collectively discerning and acknowledging what led to the original harm will not only be less resilient, but may face further entrenchment of the more resilient economic, social, and political systems that perpetuate divisions and disparities. While new challenges to communities already suffering from a legacy of unacknowledged harm can further entrench divisions, such challenges also may induce an increased willingness on the part of some formerly reluctant community members to better understand the historical antecedents of those contemporary problems. There is a saying that “reason may be clarified by disaster.” For a short time at least—such as the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the finding of environmental contamination on Bainbridge Island, the public allegations of new scandals within the Greensboro Police Department, or a series of assaults on University of Virginia students—these new traumas can force part of the privileged group(s) to abandon their previous willingness to ignore, deny, or cover up unwelcomed aspects of their history. When community members are open to examining their myths and illusions, to acknowledging the truth of the history and its impact on the present and are open to acting to rectify the truths that were illuminated, a transition is possible that builds resilience.

But in the aftermath of trauma—particularly human-induced trauma—the tendency of leaders is usually in the opposite direction, focusing solely on immediate needs such as public safety at the expense of truth-seeking efforts. Our argument is that the oft-heard plan of “looking forward rather than backward” is a false choice. Community leaders would do well to take advantage of that increased willingness to examine the past that comes in the aftermath of trauma, if for no other reason than to be better prepared to face the future.

Notes

1. See, for example, Volkan (2004).
2. Unrightable wrongs, for purposes of this essay, refer to past injustices that (1) were systematically or intentionally inflicted upon a community or identity group, often shaped by prejudice and discrimination; (2) have historic, present, and future impacts/consequences for the parties involved and the broader community; (3) have come to involve a broad and complex set of issues and stakeholders, thus making efforts at resolution seem daunting or even impossible; (4) have spiritual, moral, emotional, social, economic, and political aspects and implications (Dukes 2009).
3. The other two elements related to capacity are, first, an ability to solve problems and to translate commitment into action, and, second, access to resources.
4. That idea may seem obvious; however, other variables may stifle or repress such interest, such as shame of victimization, fear of physical violence or re-victimization, avoidance of public conflict, and unwillingness to challenge social norms.
5. Much of this section comes from the personal experience of coauthor Frank Dukes, who worked on this project as part of the reuse planning process for the Superfund site.
6. From memorial literature (<http://www.bijac.org/index.php?p=MEMORIAL-OriginMessage>): “the committee is guided by a vision for an evocative and contemplative memorial that will have the power to instruct future generations about the injustices of the past and to be forever vigilant about the fragility of assumed rights.” Photos showing the march down the long dock to the ship that would remove them from the island portray the fear and shame of those Japanese Americans and the guards with bayoneted rifles. One particularly powerful image is that of a young boy standing stoically; that boy, now Dr. Frank Kitamoto, chaired the memorial committee. The heart of the design is a long walkway toward the water, with statuary of those families; visitors will literally stand on the same path as they did.
7. Much of the material for this section has come from the experience of one of the coauthors, Jill Williams, who served as executive director of the Commission.

8. Dr. Mary Johnson, comment to “Apology,” www.edccone.com, posted 6-24-2006.
9. Lewis A. Brandon, III, Public Hearing Statement, Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission, July 15, 2005.
10. Much of this section comes from the personal experience of coauthor Frank Dukes as one of the leaders of this effort.
11. As just one example, many of the university buildings and street names honor slave owners and avid segregationists and, in the case of Jordan Hall (a leader in the field of eugenics), the need for race purification. Three graduates taught by Dr. Jordan led the Public Health Service’s (PHS) infamously unethical research (1932–1972) of untreated syphilis, in which African American men with syphilis in the study were left untreated and uninformed of their condition. This study, which ran from 1932 to 1972, is referred to as “The Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male.” It ended only after national newspapers brought it to national attention. Despite a formal apology offered by President Clinton in 1997, an enduring legacy of this and other unethical medical research conducted on African Americans has been continuing distrust about health care, medical trials, and government programs in general.
12. Approximately 4 percent of the faculty is African American, in contrast to 52 percent of the service and maintenance staff.
13. Examples of participant goals include the following (UCARE Steering Committee, September 15, 2009):
Hold UVA responsible for past acts of human oppression and demand remedy proportionate to the level and degree of said oppression.
Acknowledge and address the racial disparities in our community affecting quality of life issues such as healthcare, housing, employment, and education, with primary focus on the past, present, and future impact of the University on/among the community.
Be a catalyst for actions from a broad base of participants to address the past, current and potential harms of slavery, racial injustice and inequalities that exist among UVA and the Charlottesville community.

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