



Spring 2021 Newsletter

## **Imagining our Possibilities: Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation**

By: Dr. Tia Brown McNair, *Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Student Success and Executive Director for TRHT Campus Centers*

Recently, as I was wrapping up a podcast on my new book *From Equity Talk to Equity Walk: Expanding Practitioner Knowledge for Racial Justice in Higher Education* (co-authored with Estela Mara Bensimon and Lindsey Malcom-Piqueux), the facilitator asked, “What is the one thing that keeps you up at night?” It took me only a few seconds to identify my response: *I am a mother of a Black, teenage son*. I don’t think I need to say more. This fear for his safety and the belief in the possibility of change are what drive me in our work at the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ (AAC&U) for Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT).

What will our communities look like, feel like, and be like when the belief in a racial hierarchy no longer exists? That is the visionary question that every host institution of a TRHT Campus Center answers, as part of their efforts to dismantle the false belief in the hierarchy of human value that fuels racism and racist policies, structures, and practices within our communities. Our TRHT Campus Centers<sup>1</sup> are committed to not only imagining this possibility, but also achieving it.

Over the past three years, AAC&U has been working with institutions of higher education from across the country to develop self-sustaining, community-integrated TRHT Campus Centers. The Centers seek to prepare the next generation of leaders to build just and equitable communities, drawing on the five pillars of the TRHT framework: creating narrative change, fostering racial healing and relationship building, addressing legacies of segregation, reforming law, and overcoming economic inequalities. As Dr. Gail Christopher states in “The Time for Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation Is Now” (Christopher 2016), “Our nation has experienced a prolonged period marked by abusive police and civilian actions that have taken the lives of people of color and, at times, unleashed an equally revolting backlash against law enforcement officers. Young people around the country are spurring a drive for change, emerging as strident catalysts for activism that is aimed squarely at the hierarchy of human value and the legacy of racism in America.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> AAC&U (Association of American Colleges and Universities). 2020. *Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation (TRHT) Campus Centers*

<sup>2</sup> Christopher, G. (2016). “The Time for Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation Is Now”

AAC&U's long-term goal is to partner with at least 150 higher education institutions to host TRHT Campus Centers, each designed to identify and to examine the current realities of race relations in their communities and the local histories that have led to these realities, and to take action steps toward achieving racial equity. That effort is well underway, as illustrated in the publication *We Hold These Truths: Dismantling Racial Hierarchies, Building Equitable Communities* (2020), a collection of essays by campus leaders from the first round of AAC&U's Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation efforts. They are supported by national evaluators from Estrategia Group (<https://estrategiagroup.com>).

It is important to note that the TRHT effort does not replace diversity, equity, and inclusion work already occurring on campuses. It complements these efforts with a primary focus on racial healing and relationship building as core components for addressing systemic and structural racism on our campuses and within our communities. The Rx Racial Healing Circle™ methodology stresses active listening, truth-telling, connecting across our commonalities, and being open to the perspectives and experiences of others.<sup>3</sup> Thus, TRHT intentionally acknowledges and addresses the trauma and harm caused by racism as a foundational component for transformation on our journey to support and to develop racial trauma-informed leaders.

If you are interested in learning more about hosting a TRHT Campus Center at your institution, please contact me at [mcnair@aacu.org](mailto:mcnair@aacu.org).

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<sup>3</sup> AAC&U (Association of American Colleges and Universities) 2020. *Rx Racial Healing Circles*™

#### References:

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