

# Steps to Racial Reconciliation: A Movement to Bridge the Racial Divide and Restore Humanity

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*The United States is a divided nation on many fronts; but, race seems to be particularly divisive. This is not surprising since race is a construct created to divide the masses to be conquered by the few. This conquest allowed the foundation of the nation's social, political, and economic structures to be rooted in the institution of a unique form of slavery based on the fabricated characteristic of race. Racism (i.e., racial oppression and white racial privilege) is a dehumanizing force. When one is dehumanized, all are dehumanized. To restore the promise of life, liberty and justice for all, racial reconciliation efforts must restore humanity by addressing the harm in racial disharmony. In considering the issue of racial reconciliation in the US and focusing on social work responses within a Christian context, this paper: 1) explores foundational concepts pertinent to developing a rigorous and coherent definition of racial reconciliation; 2) develops the steps for the process of racial reconciliation efforts grounded in the conceptual model of anti-racism critical transformative potential (TP), and framed by restorative justice principles; and 3) examines how Christian and/or social work practitioners can participate in racial reconciliation efforts.*

**S**UBSTANTIAL STRIDES TO COMBAT RACIAL INJUSTICE HAVE BEEN MADE IN THE United States resulting from sociopolitical movements. Social workers, religious institutions, and citizens have united against racism and made lasting change (Bent-Goodley & Hopps, 2017; Hutchison, 2012). However, there still exist significant barriers that limit the ability to bridge racial divides in the U.S. and bring forth racial justice and equity. Under the façade of peaceful, Christian values, the U.S. is a country founded on racial violence (Zinn, 2005), the harm of which is still evident in society today (Alexander & West, 2012; Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Equal Justice Initiative, 2015;

Goffe, 2014; Tolliver, Hadden, Snowden, & Brown-Manning, 2016). Overt responses to racial harm are critical given the heightened racial tensions, spike in race-based violence, and widening divides evident in our communities (Potok, 2017). Racial reconciliation is a strategy for responding to the harm of racist action in which there is an “entity engaged in racist action” (EERA)<sup>1</sup> and a “harmed entity by racist action” (HERA). Racist actions are one way that racism is supported, maintained, and perpetuated. Racial reconciliation restores humanity by addressing the harm and suffering caused by racism, thereby moving people towards a state of racial harmony. In considering the issue of racial reconciliation in the U.S. and focusing on social work responses within a Christian context, this paper: 1) explores foundational concepts pertinent to developing a rigorous and coherent definition of racial reconciliation; 2) develops the steps for the process of racial reconciliation efforts grounded in the conceptual model of anti-racism critical transformative potential (TP), and framed by restorative justice principles; and 3) examines how Christian and/or social work practitioners can participate in racial reconciliation efforts.

### Racial Harmony

Racial harmony is more than the absence of hostility across racial lines. It requires that people behave and respond to each other in a humanist manner. As such, racial harmony includes the values of peace, respect and solidarity (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.). When there is peace within a group, two values have been upheld: resolution and protection. Resolution indicates that people are valued and that violations of humanity and the resulting harm are addressed to the extent possible (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.). Protection refers to the physical, mental and emotional safety of the affected parties (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.). When respect is upheld, all people are treated as worthy of protection, love, kindness, and empathy. Lastly, solidarity refers to the degree of mutual agreement, collective support, and connectedness among members of a group or community (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.). Solidarity grows out of shared interest, purpose, sympathy, and responsibility.

Values that build solidarity are *encounter*, (parties are invited, but not compelled, to engage with each other to make decisions about how to respond [to racist action]), *support* (parties are helped to become active [in anti-racism action] in their communities), and *moral education* (community standards of anti-racism are reinforced as the values and norms of the parties, their communities, and their societies) (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.).

<sup>1</sup> A lexicon is needed for discussions on racism. Terms are non-existent for needed concepts, such as for the person(s) or institution(s) that sponsor racist event(s) and for the person(s) or community who is violated by racist event(s). “HERA” and “EERA” replace victim-offender language, respectively.

A prerequisite for racial harmony is the disruption and elimination of racism.

### **Racism**

From the day a person is born in the U.S. or arrives on U.S. soil, there is no escaping the racialization process that includes the imposition of race and assignment to a location within a racial hierarchy. As a social construct, “race” does not signify genetic, innate differences, but instead is a measure of social, political, and economic forces and multi-level disparate treatment (Barr, 2014). Unlike racial prejudice or discrimination—i.e., the perceptions and actions by individuals and against individuals based on race—racism encompasses systematic race-based oppression of people of color through practices in institutions, laws, and cultural norms and values resulting in inequity that privileges those identified as White (Jee-Lyn García & Sharif, 2015; “Racism Defined,” 2017). In other words, racism (i.e., racial oppression and White racial supremacy/privilege) is a multi-level (e.g., interpersonal, community, institutional) and multi-systemic (e.g., education system, criminal justice system) phenomenon. It is produced, maintained, and perpetuated by systems acting alone or in concert, creating a labyrinth of intertwined circles of power and access, such that racism that affects a person’s life in one system (e.g., education) will connect to racism experienced in a separate but connected system (e.g., criminal justice). Although racism is a systemic, structural, and institutional phenomenon, racist acts (whether conscious, subconscious, or unconscious) occur at the interpersonal level, that is, by, between, and on individuals. Racist acts—actions that support, maintain, and perpetuate racism—can be enacted by individuals across racial identity groups against persons of a marginalized racial status.

Racism is embedded in the soil upon which the U.S. was founded. It is “like the water we swim in or the air we breathe” (Speight, 2007, p. 126). Likened to a virus, racism invades the host and infects every system: the individual, family, community, organizational, socio-structural (e.g., education, criminal justice, health) and macro (e.g., culture, norms, values, customs, laws, more) (King, 1967). Although an in-depth analysis of the history of racism in the U.S. is beyond the scope of this paper, it is critical to note how racism broke the covenant of America—as the land of the free—resulting in a country built on a foundation of slavery and bondage (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016; Tolliver, Hadden, Snowden, & Brown-Manning, 2016).

The invention and imposition of racial categorizations rationalized and justified the inhumane treatment, terror, murder, and enslavement of Africans by White colonizers. Many, if not all, of these colonizers identified as Christian (Battalora, 2013; Billings, 2016b; Kendi, 2016). There are oral accounts that on Goree Island, Africans were inhumanely held in the

basement of the church before being shipped into slavery (S. Talbert, email communication, January 25, 2019). This violent conquest rooted the U.S.' foundational social, political, and economic structures in the institution of a unique form of slavery that relegated socially constructed groups of people to subhuman categories. For example, historic analyses of European systems of enslavement in Latin America note the ability of those enslaved to buy their freedom and engage in some level of social mobility (Poveda, 2000). In contrast, in the U.S., slavery was tied to race and individuals in slavery were characterized as inherently inferior, and thereby incapable of equal status even if freed from slavery (Poveda, 2000). As such, human rights—protection, love, kindness, empathy, and all rights associated with being human—were violently withheld from enslaved Africans and their descendants.

At its core, racism is a war on our humanity. “For the oppressors, ‘human beings’ refers only to themselves; other people are ‘things’” (Freire, 2000, p. 57). The dehumanization and objectification of Blacks as subhuman meant Black lives no longer mattered except for the purpose of exploitation for profit and the expansion of White power. What is less often discussed is how racism is a dehumanization process for both the oppressed and the oppressor. In his memoir, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1999) describes *Ubuntu* as an understanding that people are interdependent and belong to a greater whole. As such, everyone is diminished when another is denigrated or treated as less than who they are.

Racism reduces a person's human identity by stripping culture, ethnicity, language, and individuality to fit a person within a categorical box (e.g. Black, White). In so doing, racism incapacitates minds, attacks independent thought and individual evaluation, so that there is no benefit to nuanced assessment of people. Instead, individuals are reduced to snap-judgement-based categorizations and stereotypes dependent on visible, physical characteristics used to determine a person's race (Byrne & Tanesini, 2015; Moskowitz, 2010). As such, racism involves a two-step, relational process to divide and conquer that requires first, division into binary categories: us and them (e.g., White and non-White); and, second, differential treatment based on group membership (Jones, 1997). To further indoctrinate people into the learned othering process, racism rewards those who maintain the status quo (e.g. accumulation of race-based advantage, such as through wealth and access) and punishes, from non-life threatening (e.g., harassment) to life-threatening consequences, those who do not conform. Thus, racism is a violent socialization or programming process that “alienate[s] humans from their own decision-making [and] change[s] them into objects” (Freire, 2000, p. 85). More specifically, to sustain the Black-White dichotomy, Whites are defined as superior, good, honest, truth-tellers, intelligent, and in contrast, Blacks are considered inferior, bad, dishonest, and stupid. This dichotomy exemplifies the classic opposing of forces: good versus evil.

### **Social Work and Christianity**

Given their common roots in humanitarianism, social work—a profession with an ethical mission to fight oppression (Perdue et al., 2012; Workers, 2017)—and Christianity—a religion focused on love, forgiveness, compassion, and healing (Boers, 1992)—can join forces on the frontlines to wage a war on racism, bridging racial divides and restoring humanity. The Christian church was the inaugural institution to take responsibility for systematically aiding the poor in the U.S. (Specht & Courtney, 1994), a function that is now shared with social work. The first Charity Organization Society (COS) in the US was established in Buffalo in 1877 by Reverend Humphreys Gurteen (Specht & Courtney, 1994). According to these authors, the aim was to assign a “friendly visitor” to determine which applicants for aid were worthy or deserving of assistance. Friendly visitors were predominantly, if not all, middle- and upper-class White women who would moralize and teach self-control to recipients of aid. In many respects, the communication of morality superseded in importance the concrete aid provided. This role represented significant innovation in social work and is still evident in the contemporary social worker’s role in determining deservedness of service users with the clinical interview. Social and charitable services continue to be provided by religious organizations to the those in need. Thus, “piety and religiosity run through social work and social welfare” (Specht & Courtney, 1994, p. 64). However, as all U.S. institutions were founded in and infected by racism, the social work profession and Christianity are not immune (Bae, 2016; Tisman & Clarendon, 2018). Both were and are plagued with practices and beliefs that support racism.

Early colonizers used the Christian religion (such as citing scriptures) to justify racism to gain power and economic control (Bae, 2016). Bae (2016) writes, “Columbus and the early Puritans set a precedent and established the trajectory for a moral economy that revolves around the intersectional axis of religion, economy, and race” (p. 1003). Violent racist practices were perpetuated by Christian arguments based in the purported moral inferiority of Black citizens and othering of Black Christians (Bae, 2016; Fletcher, 2016). This intentional exploitation enabled the U.S. to become an economic superpower. Following racist policies, Christian churches were racially segregated throughout U.S. history, upheld by enslavement, discriminatory separate-but-equal Jim Crow policies, and lynching culture. The Church played a formidable role in the conspiracy of silence due to the “White churches’ lack of response, frequent denial, general conformity, and even direct support of White racism” (Wallis, 2016, p. 69). This complicity was announced in the Black Manifesto, a document that grew out of the 1969 Black Economic Development Conference in Detroit, Michigan seeking reparations for the harm committed (Forman, 1969).

The U.S.' founding institutions were established to privilege White, European Christians. "Christian supremacy gave birth to White Supremacy" (Perkinson, 2004, p. 619). Racist beliefs and practices historically did and continue to inform policy. For example, welfare policies enforced by social workers undermined Black familial relationships (Jewell, 2003). Despite such policy's focus at the individual level, the U.S. economy thrives off oppressive practices that perpetuate the *structural* inequalities of its social institutions such as "mass incarceration, property rights and ownership, housing, employment, judicial prejudice, healthcare discrimination, predatory lending and foreclosure practices, and among many other practices, the recent hypervisibility of police brutality" (Bae, 2016, p. 1004). For people of color more broadly, and Black people specifically, structural racism and poverty are inextricably linked. Many Black people were and remain systematically poor for different reasons than White impoverished people, such as: 1) being excluded from economic opportunities for which they are qualified; 2) failure to provide a quality education that is critical to social mobility; and, 3) prohibited access to economic opportunities, such as low-interest mortgage rates, to amass wealth (Martin, 2013).

Understanding the interconnectedness of racism, religion, and economy in the U.S. is crucial for systemic change as part of the racial reconciliation process for these institutions. Currently, particular sects of Christianity engender harmful ideas of individualism and color-blindness (expounded upon below) that form implicit racism within Christianity (Bae, 2016). For example, Bae (2016) highlighted a study examining views held by U.S. conservative, White, Protestant Christians regarding socioeconomic gaps and inequalities. The identified beliefs included that: "social structures do not contribute to inequality; US citizens are afforded equal opportunity; individuals and their personal traits (e.g. lack of motivation; familial problems; avoidance of responsibility) are the drivers of inequity; and, government efforts to achieve racial equality are naïve, wasteful, misguided, sinful, and counteract real solutions" (Bae, 2016, p. 1009). These ideas can be found beyond the aforementioned religious and political group, such as within White, secular, liberal circles. Such perspectives locate social problems at the individual level, leading to solutions requiring individual change, rather than systemic transformation.

What becomes clear within this discussion is how the institutions and practitioners of social work and Christianity have—inadvertently and purposefully—perpetuated and justified racism. As such, social work and the Christian church have a chance to lead the racial reconciliation movement by acknowledging these truths and performing reparatory action. For Christian and social work leaders and practitioners to pioneer racial reconciliation in the U.S., Christianity and social work must undergo their own truth and reconciliation processes. Leading by example involves taking responsibility for the ways in which Christianity and social work

have contributed to or colluded in systems of racial inequity. For example, after visiting the House of Slaves on Goreé Island in 1992, Pope John Paul II asked God's forgiveness for the involvement of Christians and the Catholic Church in the slave trade that enslaved millions of African people (Diop, 1992). Although repentance is a good step in the reconciliation process, more may be required on the part of the offending party. To identify the steps in the racial reconciliation process, a better understanding of racial reconciliation is needed.

### **Racial Reconciliation**

Racial reconciliation is the process of responding to the harm of racism experienced by the injured party. It is an approach that can address racial violations while simultaneously initiating the process of healing individuals, mending relationships, building community, and transforming institutions. When racial violations occur, there may be societal pressure to strongly denounce and address the ripples of indignation that arise (Crisis and trauma, n.d.). How one responds potentially impacts reputation, social relationships, and position on the social hierarchy of oppression and privilege. Further, inherent to situations of racism is the element of fear. Responding to racial violations may involve an element of fear or questions of how to respond in the "right" way. In the stress of these moments, fear based in "unexamined assumptions, survival instinct, and old habits" (Crisis and trauma, n.d.) may dictate a response. Even in calmer moments, few effective tools for critical reflection and action may exist, resulting in a default to the deeply encoded instinct of denial and/or blame. Thus, because of the taboo nature of racism fueling the discomfort and blocking honest dialogue and skill-building efforts, many find that they are ill-equipped to respond effectively. Possibly, the language needed to discuss racism in a healthy and productive way does not exist by design. The inability to dialogue allows the oppressive status quo to continue its path of destruction. The complex needs and emotions involved cause paralysis, creating a situation in which the needs of the harmed and the EERA are left unaddressed, and the burden remains with the harmed party to bear.

While racial violations prompt hostile feelings on the part of both harmed and the EERA, the inadequate response to racial violations creates a cycle of hostility. Although punishment (e.g., job loss, public shaming) for racist actions (i.e., actions that support racism) is an inadequate response to the complex problem of racism (Buckingham, 2013; Mallett, 2015), "its use has persisted as the unquestioned status quo" (Crisis and trauma, n.d.). Punishment often "fails to educate those who cause harm, fails to address the needs for healing and repair for those harmed, and fails to account seriously for the needs of bystanders for a sense of group safety" (Crisis and trauma, n.d.). Instead, this system creates more hurt people who prove the axiom:

hurt people hurt. As such, disconnected from higher humanist values, the cycle continues: people and communities are harmed by racism, creating more hostility and greater division. If the needs of the harmed and EERA are not met, and if the damaged relationship is not addressed, the hostility is likely to remain or worsen. If, on the other hand, needs are addressed, the relationship may be moved toward reconciliation. Racial reconciliation takes into consideration both accountability and restoration, incorporating elements of Restorative Justice and anti-racism Critical Transformative Potential.

### **Restorative Justice**

Restorative justice is rooted in human dignity, healing, and interconnectedness (“Crisis and trauma,” n.d.). Also known as “healing justice” (Weitekamp & Parmentier, 2016), with origins in faith traditions, restorative justice seeks answers to a fundamentally different set of questions from the retributive justice model. The retributive justice model: 1) focuses solely on punishment of the EERA; 2) obscures the larger harms done within communities; and, 3) serves to maintain existing power structures (Hunter, Alexander, & Veterans of Hope Project, 2015). Restorative justice, on the other hand, creates discourse and accountability between an individual or entity who caused harm and those—including the community—who were harmed (Inwood, 2012). Restorative justice asks: Who has been harmed? What are their needs? Whose obligations are these? And how do we collectively work to put things right? (Zehr, 2002). In practice, restorative justice is a response to a harmful incident that seeks the inclusion of all involved to meaningfully address the harm and restore trust in relationships. It centers healing, recovery, accountability, and transformation as key goals, and seeks the restoration of all parties involved (Department of Justice, 2017). These restorative justice tenets speak to the Christian values of love, compassion, and interconnectedness, as well as the social work values of social justice, human dignity, and non-discrimination (NASW, 2017).

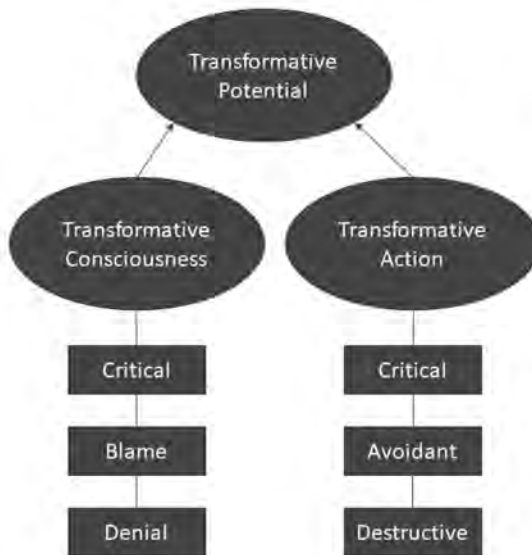
There are several principles of restorative justice that can be applied to racial reconciliation. First, restorative justice seeks to heal and right wrongs (Boers, 1992). The needs of those harmed for “validation, vindication, restitution, testimony, safety, and support are starting points for justice” (Department of Justice, 2017). The physical, mental, and emotional safety of those harmed is an immediate priority, and the restorative justice process provides a framework to promote the recovery from the racist experience and the healing of the individual or community harmed (Department of Justice, 2017; Weitekamp & Parmentier, 2016). Although the harmed parties hold power in the process as their input and participation is central to determining needs and outcomes, EERAs are involved in remedying the harm as much as possible. Second, the restorative justice process “maximizes opportunities for exchange of information, participation, dialogue, and mutual consent”

(Department of Justice, 2017) between those harmed and the EERA(s). The harmed entities have the fundamental responsibility for defining and directing the terms and conditions of the exchanges between parties; however, “mutual agreement takes precedence over imposed outcomes [and] opportunities are provided for remorse [and] forgiveness” (Department of Justice, 2017). Within this reconciliation process, the EERA’s needs and competencies are also addressed (Inwood, 2012). Restorative justice “values personal change above compliance of behavior” (Department of Justice, 2017). Third, the justice process belongs in the community. Recognizing that people are interdependent and belong to a greater whole, such that racism harms the humanity of EERAs as well, healing and integration of EERAs into the community is emphasized (Freire, 2000). Restorative justice actively involves community members, “draws from community resources, and, in turn, contributes to the building and strengthening of community” (Department of Justice, 2017). “The [healing] justice process attempts to promote changes in the community to both prevent similar harms from happening to others, and to foster early intervention to address the needs of [HERAs] and the accountability of [EERAs]” (Department of Justice, 2017). Unintended consequences such as co-optation of restorative processes for coercive or punitive ends, or the expansion of social control, are not permitted (Department of Justice, 2017).

### **Transformative Potential**

Transformative potential (TP)—a philosophical, theoretical, and practice-based framework, informed by and developed in response to the theoretical limitations of Freire’s (2000) critical consciousness pedagogy—is defined as levels of consciousness and action that produce the potential to transform contextual factors and relationships perpetuating inequitable conditions necessary for equitable change at one or more socio-eco-systemic levels (e.g., interpersonal, microsystem, macrosystem) (Jemal, 2017b). TP is comprised of two measurable dimensions: transformative consciousness (TC) and transformative action (TA). Transformative consciousness refers to the level of awareness of structural inequity within one or more socio-ecosystems and is made of up three hierarchical levels—denial, blame, and critical. Implicit within the critical consciousness dimension is awareness of one’s responsibility for maintaining the status quo and one’s accountability for action. Transformative action (TA) is defined as levels of action taken to address inequity at one or more levels of the socio-ecosystem (Jemal & Bussey, 2018). Transformative action is also made up of three tiered levels—destructive, avoidant, and critical. Implicit within the critical action dimension is efficacy and competency to successfully take action. Both dimensions (TC and TA) determine one’s level of transformative potential (TP), indicating with what capacity and how likely one is to engage in transformative change addressing inequity at one or more socio-ecosystemic levels—intrapersonal (a person’s

beliefs, actions, thoughts, and attitudes), interpersonal (within relationships between individuals), microsystem (neighbors, family), mesosystem (interactions between those in an individual's microsystem), exosystem (institutions and systems, like the justice system), macrosystem (culture, laws, and norms), and chronosystem (how the past lives in the present and determines the future) (Jemal, 2017a, 2017b).



**Figure 1.**

Conceptual model of transformative potential. The figure illustrates the two dimensions and hierarchical levels of each dimension for transformative potential.

Since both dimensions of TP (i.e., TC and TA) have hierarchical levels (TC: critical, blame, denial; TA: critical, avoidant, destructive), TP can be critical—the highest level of TP made up of critical TC and critical TA—or non-critical (TC: blame and denial; and/or TA: avoidant and destructive).

### **Non-critical Transformative Potential**

***Non-critical transformative consciousness: Blame and denial consciousness.*** The two non-critical levels of TC are blame and denial consciousness. Denial consciousness is the inability to acknowledge the underlying structural and socio-political forces perpetuating individual and social issues (Jemal, 2018). Blame consciousness is a state in which people perceive themselves and their social situations as essentially undamaged, but perceive that others are to blame for personal and social problems,

disregarding socio-structural forces (Jemal, 2016). The slow process of racial reconciliation in the US is likely due to the predominance of people in a state of blame or denial consciousness. This state of non-critical consciousness stems from collective cognitive dissonance regarding the social construction of race and creation of a racial hierarchy.

The theory of cognitive dissonance states that people tend to seek consistency in their beliefs, perceptions, and behaviors (Festinger, 1957). When beliefs conflict with perceptions or behavior, tension and feelings of discomfort develop, prompting people to engage in actions to reduce the discomfort. The two lower levels of transformative consciousness (TC) may reduce cognitive dissonance, but problematically maintain and perpetuate racism in the U.S. Denial TC fails to comprehend or acknowledge that racism is an issue. Denial TC becomes visible in responses of disbelief to acts of overt bigotry. Responses of shock reflect the underlying belief that racism is uncommon and only presents in rare instances. Blame TC is evidenced by people who ask: "What's wrong with those people," rather than, "What's wrong with the way those people have been treated?" For example, people with blame TC reconcile the overrepresentation of people of color in the justice system with the explanation that people of color engage in higher rates of crime or substance misuse than their White counterparts. They fail to identify the racist structural issues creating this disproportionality. Evaluations of the issue also turn a blind eye to statistics indicating equivalent or greater engagement in criminal behavior and substance misuse by White people and the benefits of not being racially profiled (Alexander & West, 2012). In summary, within blame TC, racist actions are attributed to individual deficiencies as opposed to being representations of racist socialization and a White supremacist system.

Strategies to resolve cognitive dissonance include racial apathy, ignorance as to the experience of people of color (such as through white racial framing), and color-blind racism. Forman (2004) defines racial apathy as "indifference toward societal racial and ethnic inequality and lack of engagement with race-related social issues" (p. 44). Racial apathy is sustained through white ignorance (Mills, 2017).

The refusal to perceive systemic discrimination, the convenient amnesia about the past and its legacy in the present, ...the hostility to the Black testimony on continuing white privilege and the need to eliminate it so as to achieve racial justice (Mills, 2017, pp. 70).

With white racial framing, Whites collude in or rationalize the systemic processes that facilitate and maintain ongoing racial privilege and inequality (Wingfield & Feagin, 2012) by viewing society through an invisible but privileged lens or veil. As Du Bois (1999) brilliantly conceptualized nearly

a century ago, the veil separating Black people from White people exists in the psyche of White people and perpetuates the racial hierarchy.

White ignorance and White racial framing are premised on the concept of color-blind racism. As alluded to above, color-blind racism assumes that: most people do not notice nor care about race or racial differences anymore; racial parity has been achieved; any persistent patterns of racial inequality are the result of individual and or group-level shortcomings rather than structural ones; and, therefore, there is no need for institutional remedies (such as affirmative action) to redress persistent racialized outcomes (Forman, & Lewis, 2016, p. 177). Color-blind racism sustains White supremacy and perpetuates the denial of structural power imbalances and inequities that exist between Whites and people of color. It obscures culpability for racial violence and harm, creating the opportunity for people to deny the truth of inhumane treatment (denial consciousness), and blame a person's race for the inhumane treatment experienced (blame consciousness). Although, these strategies appear to apply only to White people, Mills (2017) and other scholars (Liu, 2017) identify ways in which individuals who are racially marginalized enact similar strategies of blame and denial consciousness. For example, both White people and people of color may embody the perspectives of White ignorance and color-blind racism. Mills (2017) indicates that individuals of color may employ strategies of White ignorance, similar to those holding race-based privilege against other people of color; and, Liu (2017) points to the ways in which people of color have been socialized to support White privilege/supremacy. These strategies require not caring, not listening to, not validating, and not acknowledging marginalized narratives and truths. Most importantly, people exhibiting denial and blame TC at one or more socio-ecosystemic levels fail to see a role for themselves in the creation of solutions. Thus, denial and blame TC allow race-based disparate treatment and outcomes to persist in every U.S. institution and socio-political domain, including education, the justice system, health, child welfare, employment, housing, and wealth attainment (Alexander & West, 2012; Bangs & Davis, 2015; Billings, 2016a; Leonardo, 2004; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016).

***Non-critical transformative action: Avoidant and destructive action.***

The two non-critical levels of TA are avoidant and destructive action. Destructive actions are those that exert overt harm on individuals, while avoidant actions are passive endorsements of harm through inaction. Historic examples of destructive actions include the lynching of Black people to sustain segregation and race-based inequity, and violence against civil rights efforts, while avoidant action would be failure to fight against such terrorism and instead endorsing the status quo. "To affirm that men and women are persons, and as persons, should be free, and yet to

do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce” (Freire, 2000, p. 50). Specifically, people of color display avoidant and destructive action when their actions either: support the inequitable status quo, such as by complying with racially discriminatory hiring practices at work, or not challenging racist characterizations of community events; or, they actively participate to undermine strategies to address racism such as by voting against race-conscious policies (e.g. affirmative action) or endorsing ‘tough on crime’ approaches to policing, which disproportionately target and criminalize people of color. In the current day, destructive actions have morphed into a subtler, but still harmful, form. This includes: micro-aggressions, modern-day lynching by law enforcement and civilian vigilantes; the targeted incarceration of Black and Brown people through policies such as stop and frisk; predatory financial lending; the continuance of red-lining, resulting in de facto race segregation; gerrymandering; and, environmental injustices such as relegation of people living in poverty to locations with toxic waste and contaminated water (Alexander & West, 2012; Hudson & Gehlert, 2015; Rothstein, 2017; Shavers & Shavers, 2006; Stevenson, 2017). A key idea is that non-action is avoidant action; whereas critical action is proactive.

### **Anti-racism Critical Transformative Potential**

***Critical transformative consciousness.*** Critical transformative consciousness is a continuous process towards liberation, and ultimately, racial reconciliation. Critical TC is needed to uncover and reconcile hidden truths. Critical TC provides a platform for: voicing truths of previously silenced and marginalized populations; and testimony by and accountability of oppressors to the atrocities committed. James Baldwin (1993) noted that *not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced* (Yu, 2017). Critical TC for racial reconciliation purposes requires facing the truth that the seeds of inequity sowed in this country’s terrain by its original colonizers has caused the reaping of inequity at each systemic level (from micro to macro). Although the institution of slavery, lasting about 400 years, was abolished approximately 150 years ago with the ratification of the 13th Amendment, it was followed by Jim Crow Era Black Codes, convict leasing, sharecropping, debtors’ prison—and decades of apartheid—that only legally “ended” with the signing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. As a result, racial oppression and White racial privilege persists (Alexander & West, 2012; Kendi, 2016), and thus, racially “marginalized populations not only contend with the current day-to-day discrimination and inequity, but also encounter the cumulative impact of inequity that stems from the past” (Jemal & Bussey, 2018, p. 38). Critical TC for anti-racism requires analysis of how racial oppression and White supremacy/

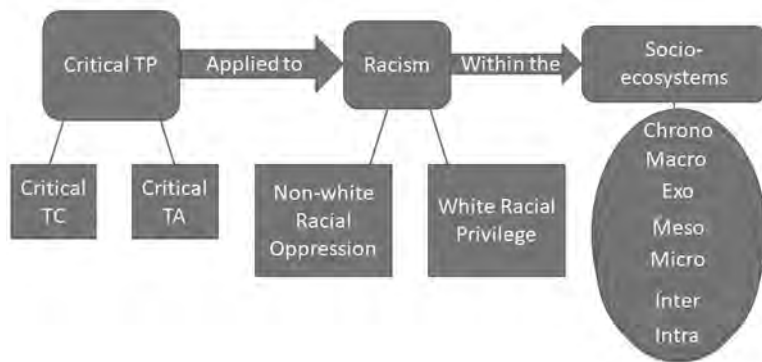
privilege affects and operates at each systemic level.

**Critical transformative action.** In conjunction with critically analyzing how racial oppression and privilege manifest at each socio-ecosystemic level, for racial reconciliation to occur, there must be anti-racism action at every level. The enslavement of people of African descent violently destroyed cultures, family, and lineage, and thus, reparable interventions are necessary for healing and transforming current race relations (Coates, 2017; McCarthy, 2004; Stevenson, 2017; Vails, 1999). Stemming from restorative justice principles discussed above and the human rights framework of truth and reconciliation (Cohen, 2001), Stevenson purports that through truthful dialogue about historic racial violence, reconciliation will follow (Equal Justice Initiative, 2015; Remnick, 2016; Wallis, 2016). White naiveté around the White supremacist history in the US “negate[s] the need for measures to repair the inequities of the past” as Whites collectively ignore history and view it instead through a sanitized, mythic lens (Mills, 2017, p. 62-64). What are needed are policies that purposely create equal outcomes, not simply equal opportunity for Black people [emphasis added] (Stevenson, 2014). Stevenson (2017) criticizes the assumption that repairing the harm endured from genocide and slavery is merely economic, and the author notes that the discourse around reparations in the US fails to see how “the opposite of poverty is justice” not merely monetary compensation (Equal Justice Initiative, 2015; Remnick, 2016).

*Reparations.* Arguments against reparations cite the challenges of drawing a causal or ancestral line between past harms from genocide and chattel slavery to current inequities. Further, critics point to the issue of inter-temporality—that since moral norms are different now than at the time of the harms committed, rectification of prior harms is unfair (Lenzerini, 2008; McCarthy, 2002, 2004; Moellendorf, 2009; Vails, 1999). However, everyone in the U.S. bears collective responsibility and liability (McCarthy, 2004). The U.S. cannot be morally whole without healing the harms caused by the country’s creation which currently persist (Coates, 2017). “Reparations... [are] the price we must pay to see ourselves squarely... Reparations beckon us to reject the intoxication of hubris and see America as it is—the work of fallible humans” (Coates, 2017, p. 202). The urgency to address what ails the country goes beyond moral necessity. The U.S.’ history of oppression must be accounted for and acknowledged within meaningful solutions to society’s inequities (Coates, 2017; Vails, 1999).

At the core of anti-racism critical TP is the need for transformation through: truth-telling—people in the U.S. gaining an understanding of why and how racism operates from past to present; and, repair-action (i.e., reparations and action)—the taking of conscious, concrete, and consistent multi-systemic action against racism, in all its manifestations,

and consequences. Thus, racial reconciliation incorporates the development of anti-racism transformative potential (TP); that is, critical transformative potential applied to racism at one or more levels of the socio-ecosystem. If racism is comprised of *dehumanizing* thought and action, then racial reconciliation requires *humanizing* thought and action; that is, anti-racism TP. Anti-racism TP is grounded in Freire's (2000) critical consciousness (CC) theory, incorporates critical race theory (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), and is informed by Bronfenbrenner's (2014) socio-ecological model and the cognitive-behavioral framework (Beck, 2011; Ellis & Ellis).



**Figure 2.**

Conceptual model of the process of racial reconciliation. The figure illustrates the dimensions and pathways for racial reconciliation.

Anti-racism critical TP shifts the perspective from racist, individual blame, to the intersection of historical and socio-ecological factors of accountability, allowing for critical analysis of the impact of racial injustices in U.S. history and the effects of history in our present-day realities (Jemal & Bussey, 2018). This pedagogy involves dismantling the myths that support the inferiority of people of color and further bolster White privilege. Such myths—of scarcity (there's not enough to satisfy everyone's needs), meritocracy (you earned what you have), equal opportunity (that opportunities are fair, sufficient, and available to all), and materialism (a person's value is determined by the quantity of tangible items that they own)—keep White privilege invisible (Feagin & O'Brien, 2003; McCarthy, 2004; Mills, 2017; Vails, 1999), counter universal humanity, and create division, isolation, and powerlessness. Anti-racism critical TP within the socio-ecological model identifies: individual, institutional, historical, and systemic forces that create inequitable opportunities for particular groups (Freire, 1970; Ginwright & James, 2002; Hatcher et al., 2011; Jemal, 2016) and the impact of socialization into White supremacy and racial oppression

(Harrison, 1995; Kendi, 2016). As McCarthy (2004, pp. 757–758, emphasis in original) effectively establishes, there exists collective responsibility and liability in the U.S. for

the enduring harms...that have resulted from legally sanctioned injuries of race under earlier regimes. Each generation of citizens, whether native- or foreign-born, inherits the burdens of membership—the national debts, as it were—together with the benefits of membership... The issue here is not whether individual citizens' ancestors owned slaves, or whether they have personally benefited from discrimination against Blacks, but that they now share in and benefit from an unjustly acquired and unfairly distributed national inheritance. *This is not a matter of collective guilt but of collective responsibility; and reparation is not a matter of collective punishment but of collective liability.*

Anti-racism critical TP can empower social workers and members of the Christian faith to “examine the nature and extent of their own social privilege, explore personal biases and beliefs and the resulting oppression, and develop their capacity for action to challenge unjust conditions” (Jemal, 2017b, p. 4). Particular to the U.S., racial reconciliation infused with anti-racism critical TP addresses a legacy of enslavement, genocide, and White supremacy.

### **The Process of Racial Reconciliation**

Integrating elements of restorative justice and anti-racism critical TP, the racial reconciliation process includes six steps: 1) identifying levels and affected parties; 2) inclusion; 3) encounter; 4) amends; 5) community reintegration; and 6) transformation. These steps to racial reconciliation, if done by the masses, may start a movement to bridge the racial divide and restore humanity.

#### **Step 1. Identifying Levels and Affected Parties**

The first step in the racial reconciliation process is to identify the racist action(s) (i.e., acts committed that support, maintain, perpetuate racism), determine what harm occurred, at which level(s) (e.g., interpersonal, meso, macro) the harm occurred, by whom/what (EERA) and to whom (HERA). For example, the killings of unarmed Black people by the police is at the interpersonal, meso, and macro levels. At the interpersonal level, a law enforcement agent (EERA) killed the unarmed Black person (HERA). At the meso level, the HERA's immediate community is harmed. Moreover,

the repeated killings of unarmed Black people harm the Black community at large (HERA). At the macro level, the police force (EERA) maintains a culture that allows these killings to continuously occur to Black people (HERA). The primary HERAs are those most directly affected by the racist acts, but also harmed are family members, witnesses, and members of the affected community. When the EERA is an institution, then a high-ranking official can represent the institution, such as a principal, superintendent, commanding officer, CEO, warden, or President of the U.S. Social work's foundational, multi-level person-in-environment assessment and the Christian social worker's critical, structural lens are apropos at this juncture (Finn & Jacobson, 2008).

### **Step 2. Inclusion**

The second step of the racial reconciliation process is inclusion. Inclusion involves actively inviting and seeking the full participation of all affected parties—HERAs, EERA, and community members—to engage in addressing the harm caused by the racial violation (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.). Participants are fundamental in the quest for restoration, healing, responsibility, and prevention. As an empowering experience, all parties are invited to directly shape and engage in restorative processes and are equipped to effectively influence and participate in the response to the racist offense. Inclusivity gives voice to those involved in and harmed by a racist incident and invites dialogue between HERAs and EERAs (Center for Justice, n.d.). Inclusion and empowerment build respect needed for racial harmony (Centre for Justice, n.d.). The Christian social worker's skill set around authentic engagement and rapport-building is important to leverage for this step. Rooted in Christian beliefs of forgiveness and redemption, the social worker can communicate belief in the potential for healing. Social work skills in active listening, awareness of one's assumptions, values and biases, understanding worldviews of different cultures, considering diverse perspectives, summarizing, and bringing in systemic influences facilitate a successful outcome for this step (Davis, Lyubansky, & Schiff, 2015; Finn & Jacobson, 2008).

### **Step 3. Encounter**

The third step in the process of racial reconciliation is the encounter between all affected parties, but specifically and most importantly, between the HERA and the EERA (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.). First, many of the ideas from which racist actions occur stem from assumptions, stereotypes, and misinformation. Thus, personal encounters provide opportunities for dialogue that can challenge/debunk mischaracterizations and

allow both parties to recognize the other's humanity—an important step for developing empathy. There are many methods of encounter, including in-person, facilitated meeting, exchange of letters, and video conferencing (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.). In addition, there are several meeting types such as mediation, conferencing, and circles (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.). In such meeting types, the HERAs meet with the EERAs; with HERA—EERA impact panels, the meetings are between representative HERAs and EERAs. Ideally, the encounter allows the parties to directly engage with each other. During the encounter, the parties share their narratives. With HERA impact statements, HERAs describe what happened to them, how that has affected them, and how they view the racist incident(s) and its consequences. This is a subjective rather than objective account and, consequently, it has integrity both to the speaker and to the listener (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.). A platform is also provided for truth-telling by EERAs in which they admit their racist wrongdoing, which can include acting on implicit bias. In the ideal circumstance, a restorative encounter that gives voice to how one was harmed and how one has harmed can be powerful and potentially life-changing.

One key factor for a restorative encounter to be healing is the emotion and authenticity of the encounter (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.). Narrative permits the participants to express and address emotion. Racist offenses can produce powerful emotional responses that violate social norms for dispassionate interactions. Encounter programs allow the expression of emotions via a healthy outlet. This may result in healing for both HERAs and EERAs. The emotion that may be experienced in the encounter underlies the critical need for trained facilitators who can prepare participants and establish ground rules. As a result, racist offenses and their consequences are addressed not only rationally, but emotionally as well.

By sharing narratives and emotions, the meeting may lead to a better sense of one another's humanity, as well as cultivate empathy. The HERA may not develop positive feelings toward the EERA or forgive the EERA; however, the EERA may become more understandable as a person (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.). Likewise, for EERAs, hearing the HERAs' story not only humanizes the HERAs but also can change the EERAs' attitude about their racist behavior. Reaching this common understanding establishes a productive foundation for agreeing upon what happens next. The work done in the encounter seeks a unique resolution that reflects the circumstances and fits the immediate needs of the parties (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.). This process allows "negotiation through the convergence of the interests of HERA and EERA by giving them the ability to guide the outcome" (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.) Depending on the meeting type and method of communication, the

Christian social work practitioner can assist the parties to clarify what they hope to communicate or achieve prior to interaction. The practitioner can mediate the interaction using strategies that: facilitate respectful communication; create a space in which all participants' perspectives are valued; and navigate moments of tension (Finn & Jacobson, 2008). Thus, the restorative encounter for racial reconciliation increases the parties' ability to see each other as persons, to respect each other, to identify with the experiences of the other, and to arrive at an agreement. Bearing witness to a person's process is invaluable around moments of crisis. While the practitioner may not have all the answers, the benefit of standing alongside participants in this process is not to be dismissed.

#### **Step 4. Amends.**

Racial reconciliation seeks to repair the harm resulting from the racist event. Whenever possible this repair should be done by the person(s) or institution(s) (represented by persons) responsible for the harm. Importantly, making amends for the harm requires EERAs to take responsibility for their actions and for the harm they have caused. In other words, EERAs must reach the critical stage of transformative consciousness by ending denial and ceasing to blame the HERA (for their own oppression), others or circumstances. The fourth step, making amends, consists of apology, changed behavior, and restitution (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.). Each element has potential for helping all involved heal.

**Apology.** The apology is acknowledgement of the HERA's experience with the appropriate affect accompanied by a sense of vulnerability. With acknowledgement, the EERA accepts responsibility for hurting the HERA by his/her racist actions. In anti-racism critical TP, there is a critical level of responsibility in which the person must see the part or role they played in the situation, and accountability in which the person must answer for their actions. In restorative justice practice, people causing harm are responsible and held accountable for their actions to the people whom they have hurt. Active responsibility can be contrasted with passive responsibility in that active responsibility arises from within and passive responsibility is imposed by others (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.). The collaboration—in which all parties are invited to find solutions through mutual, consensual decision-making—is a factor in active responsibility. This allows for another step—the selection of appropriate reparations—to be discussed and enacted (Crisis and trauma, n.d.).

The EERA also accepts that there was real harm caused by this conduct and does not try to defend, justify, excuse or deflect. “Finally, the EERA accepts that the harm caused was experienced by another human being who did not deserve the harm” (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.).

The apology must have the appropriate affect—genuine expression of regret or remorse—expressed verbally or with body language. Witnessing EERAs express regret can be healing for HERAs. However, the EERA may feel deep regret but be unable to express it in ways that can be appreciated fully by the HERA. This will not, however, prevent racial reconciliation.

Vulnerability has to do with a shift in power between the [EERA] and the [HERA]. One of the realities of racism is that the EERA has asserted their control or power over the [HERA] to commit [the racist act]. In apologizing, the EERA gives control and power to the [HERA], who can decide whether to accept the apology. The EERA cannot know what the [HERA] will do before offering the apology. In offering the apology, the EERA cedes to the [HERA] the control and power over himself/herself. (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.).

**Behavior change.** Changed behavior by the EERA means not committing additional acts that contribute to the perpetuation of racism (i.e., racist actions). Different results may require change in the EERA's environment and social networks that support racist behaviors, helping the EERA learn new anti-racist behaviors, and rewarding positive, anti-racism change. EERAs are provided opportunities and encouragement, through collaborative negotiation, to understand the harm they have caused to HERAs and the community, and to develop plans for taking appropriate responsibility that informs their behavior (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.).

**Restitution.** Violations of people's humanity create obligations and liabilities. When a contract is breached, the breaching party must make the non-breaching party whole—back to the state as if the breach never occurred—or as close to whole as possible. The EERA's obligation to remedy the harm is through restitution. The restitution involved in “making amends can be reparative (e.g., reimbursing for, mending, or replacing what was damaged), and restorative (offering emotional healing, reassurance, safety)” (Davis, Lyubansky, & Schiff, 2015, p. 2). Restitution should first be directed toward the persons suffering direct harm from the racist acts. Since the primary obligation is to the HERAs, a restorative process empowers HERAs to effectively participate in defining obligations. Although EERAs may experience restitution as difficult, or even painful, restitution is not intended as vengeance or revenge (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.).

Reparative restitution (i.e., reparations) can be actions made by returning, replacing, or repairing property (e.g., painting a wall where EERA drew swastika); through financial means; or by providing direct services to the HERA (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.). If community

service is agreed to as a way of “paying a debt to society,” it is important to have a clear link between the offense and the community service activity (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.). “[EERAs] may offer to perform services that are not related to the racist act or to the HERA, but that are understood by the HERA as evidence of a sincere apology” (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.). For example, the EERA may agree to perform community service at an agency the HERA chooses. Ideally, restitution will have a direct connection to the needs and interests of the HERA (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.). Importantly, outcomes decided upon must feel fair and reasonable to all those participating (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.).

This step works toward healing that which has been broken by racism and reducing future harm through racism prevention or anti-racism efforts. A restorative response seeks to address the harms—both tangible and intangible—resulting from an incident, and to do what is possible to help meet the needs of all affected (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.). EERAs, in different ways than HERAs, have also been harmed – dehumanized by dehumanizing another - and need restoration. Restoration refers to a continuum of responses to address the needs of and harms experienced by the HERA, EERAs, and the community (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.). To address the structural nature of oppression, communities may choose recommending community healing through dialogue circles, public monuments, museum exhibits, a community justice center, anti-racism training, or institutional reform, such as a police review board (Davis, Lyubansky, & Schiff, 2015).

At this step, social work practitioners using a Christian context might assist in a variety of ways. Facilitating appropriate communication within the process of apology is critical. The Christian tradition of confession and forgiveness of sins aligns well with and informs this framework. Offering supportive counseling and reminding participants of the larger goals and values may ease challenging moments. Social workers may also facilitate the negotiation process around restitution and amends. Specific to the EERA, the social worker may engage the individual in critical consciousness raising to enhance their understanding of systemic racism and the connection between the racist action and the larger historical context. Additional skill-building or case management services may be necessary to help the EERA position themselves to not cause harm in the future. More concretely, practitioners may engage community agencies and organizations with the community service component.

For the HERAs, therapeutic support may be beneficial when working through the complicated emotions that can arise from the apology process. For some HERAs, longer term trauma-informed or spiritual support may be necessary, and the practitioner can complete such referrals. The

practitioner can engage in community healing and organizing efforts to identify and eradicate sources of racial harm. Practitioners can align with community members to discern restorative steps (e.g., healing circles, anti-racism education groups, joining coalitions of faith-based anti-racism initiatives, advocacy for improved community conditions). Importantly, the practitioner is not to impose their values onto the needs of the community, but instead proceed with cultural humility and openness (Finn & Jacobson, 2008).

### **Step 5. Community Reintegration.**

When acts that support racism occur, obligations and liabilities are created for the community (Sharpe, 1998). The community bears a responsibility for the welfare of its members and the social conditions and relationships which promote both racist acts and community peace. Community reintegration creates connection in place of division. This step encourages collaboration and reintegration rather than coercion and isolation (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.). Racist action often alienates members of the community and creates distrust—and these actions may also be symptoms of such conditions” (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.). Sometimes HERAs are uncomfortable reminders that racist events can happen to other community members. Out of fear, people may attempt to ignore, or explain away what happened by blaming the HERA or wishing he/she would “just get over it” (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.)—effectively taking the non-critical TP mindset (i.e., denial and blame) like oppressors. These actions separate the HERA from the community and can lead to stigmatization. EERAs also face stigmatization. Since overt racist acts cause fear in the community and are usually publicly taboo (even though covert racism is the status quo and baked into US institutions), EERAs may become vilified in the eyes of society and scapegoated when convenient. Where possible, community reintegration will repair relationships and restore trust.

Reintegration occurs when the HERA and EERA can become involved in anti-racism action within their communities. To accomplish this, HERAs and EERAs must find communities that have intolerance for—but understanding the genesis of—racist behavior by members of the community (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.). The following are examples of such communities. **Support groups** containing participants that have common HERA or EERA experiences, and thus, understand the experiences of the members. These shared experiences help build self-esteem, respect, commitment, understanding, and more positive responses for anti-racism efforts (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.). **Faith communities** may provide resources and services that fulfil the steps of racial reconciliation

(Centre for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d.). For example, Christianity is filled with traditions and examples of caring for those in need, forgiveness, and acceptance of repenting EERAs into the community. Social work practitioners within a Christian context may assist with the development of or engagement with support groups, community groups, or mutual aid resources. Assisting the HERA and/or EERA in navigating these various opportunities and settings can greatly encourage successful connection.

### **Step 6. Transformation.**

Restorative justice is future-oriented and asks the question: “What needs to happen to reduce the chance of people being harmed again?” The work explores not only how change can occur but also into what does change create? In this way, the incident itself becomes a catalyst for efforts toward creating a healthier and safer organization or community. The racial reconciliation process ends with transformation as its final step because the process produces fundamental changes in people, relationships, and communities. Transformation requires cooperative effort by all parties involved and social systems—individuals, communities, and institutions – so that the harm will not reoccur. In other words, transformation strengthens the community, relationships, and individuals to prevent further harms.

Anti-racism work grounded in critical TP is needed for prevention. Transformative potential presents a framework that targets people’s misconceived notions on race, structural inequalities, and actions that perpetuate the racist status quo. Christianity has the potential to produce credible messengers in anti-racism work. Although any religious institution could and should produce anti-racism credible messengers, Christianity’s history with its use and support of racism (e.g., used by the KKK to justify their racial hatred and rhetoric, symbolism of burning crosses on private property to terrorize) in the U.S.—and as a privileged religion in the U.S.—has a unique platform to produce credible messengers. Leaders like preachers and “[t]heologians bear the responsibility for the public meaning of the gospel, but this also means that theologians have the tools to reshape the public meaning of the gospel in anti-racist theologies” (Fletcher, 2016, p. 78). For instance, Christian preacher Jim Wallis (2016) is a credible messenger who demonstrates how Christianity can transform its history by applying gospel within an anti-racism framework. He states,

We must replace fear with facts...we must name racism as sins against our neighbors and against the God who made us all in God’s image. Multiracial truth telling about race as America’s original sin is urgently needed, and faith communities must always lift up the voices of diverse

believers so that they can share their own stories. It is time for churches to emphatically renounce bigotry and become the multiethnic body of Christ that God wants us to be. It is time to nurture our children in a faith that unites and doesn't divide. And it is time to recommit ourselves to love, care for, and sustain one another as together we seek to be ambassadors for a new order that Jesus called the kingdom of God" (p. xx-xi).

Thus, transformation increases the community's capacity to recognize and respond to racism; thereby, working to prevent future occurrences.

### **Conclusion**

The U.S. has great potential to uphold ideals of liberty, equality, and justice, but that potential may never be realized if racial reconciliation does not occur on a grand scale. A racial reconciliation movement is needed to shift U.S. society from one steeped in racism to one of racial harmonies. By developing the six-step process of racial reconciliation, this paper demonstrates one way social work can respond, leveraging a Christian lens. Racial reconciliation—a strategy to counter the harms of racism—is built upon restorative justice principles of human dignity, healing, and interconnectedness and anti-racism TP. According to restorative justice principles, the process of racial reconciliation is underway when entities causing racial harm understand the impact of their actions on others, communities and relationships, and take responsibility by making amends to the persons and community harmed (Davis, Lyubansky, & Schiff, 2015). Since racism is a multi-level phenomenon, racial reconciliation requires the development of anti-racism critical TP to facilitate peace and healing for all involved parties via anti-racism critical dialogue and action, and ultimately builds community capacity to prevent and/or manage racism and its harmful consequences (Davis, Lyubansky, & Schiff, 2015). Anti-racism TP encompasses perception and action: the perception that to take care of oneself, it is necessary to take care of others (i.e. shared fate); and, action towards systemic change, addressing the power imbalances and lack of access to resources at multiple levels and in multiple systems (Jemal, 2017b). Freire (2000) maintained that individuals living in oppressive societies—whether oppressors or oppressed—would only realize their full humanity through the critical analysis of injustice and transformative action against inequity. By addressing the harm of racism, humanity can be reclaimed. This undermines the toxic 'us/them' divide and moves us toward racial harmony. When as many willing participants as possible join the racial reconciliation struggle and bear the burden of this inherited contaminated legacy, we assert with full consciousness and action that

racial reconciliation is not a struggle for ourselves alone; it is a struggle “to save the soul of America” (King, 1960). ❖

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**Keywords:** racism, white privilege, racial reconciliation, restorative justice, transformative potential, healing